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THE PRIMA DONNA.

THE PRIMA DONNA

BY

SARAH WILLIAMS

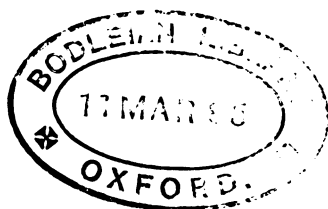
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THE PRIMA DONNA.



CHAPTER I.

THE DOCTOR.

“**W**ILL she live, doctor?”

The doctor stood, grave, thoughtful, and somewhat timid, in his medical reluctance to give pain. His questioner, a slight, eager woman, with dark eyes and brown hair, repeated, “Will she live?”

“We will hope so.”

Standing by the window, seeming to absorb the light and give out blackness, stood a tall, dark man, silently looking out. The woman turned to him, and said,—the sickroom-hush in her words only giving them intensity,—“I will never forgive you, never.”

The man stirred a little, uneasily; then, in a baited, sullen tone, replied, “I will resign her to you if you wish.”

“You promise?”

“Certainly.”

Her face brightened, but she said, “You know I have no cause to trust your word; let me have your promise in writing.”

"As you will." He spoke with a French shrug of the shoulders and lifting of the eyebrows, a show of scorn that but raggedly covered shame.

With the still swiftness that seemed natural to her, she fetched writing materials, and wrote; then, motioning to the doctor, she said, "Witness that he hears and signs this." She read aloud: "I, Jules Rameau, do hereby resign all claim, right, and title to my daughter Luigia Rameau, in favour of her maternal aunt, Huldah Owain."

When he and the doctor had signed the paper, Jules Rameau resumed his distant post by the window, and the others returned to the side of the bed, whereon lay a sick child.

Presently the doctor said in a low tone to Huldah, "I do not think that document would be binding."

"Not? Then how can I get rid of him? How would you rid yourself of a man?"

"Lend him fifty pounds," said the doctor, with an absent smile of recollection.

"I never thought of that." She went to where her brother-in-law stood, and said, "Would fifty pounds rid me of you?"

He looked at her a moment, an indolent scrutiny, but keen, then answered, "I accept—"

"You would never see me more?"

"If it would not pain you, *ma belle sœur*, to lose me so."

"Come, then."

Huldah left the room, followed by Rameau. Before long she returned alone. The doctor looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, he is gone," she answered.

"Where?"

"To Havre, first. I do not know where afterwards."

Oh, I am glad ! Now, perhaps, the good God will heal the child."

She clasped her hands, an unconscious, strength-seeking grasp, the one weak hand supporting the other, and began praying ; mutely, but with swaying figure and gasping breath—" More like a devotee than a decent Christian," said the doctor to himself.

Something seemed to annoy him, for he took the first opportunity to say,—

" I should strongly recommend you to leave me with our little patient for a while."

" She is not conscious ?"

" No, but we are so sympathetic, even in sleep or delirium, and you are, pardon me, rather too excited."

Just then the child said, plaintively, " Mamma mia—ah ! più non vive, la chiamo in van."

" Listen, doctor ; my own sister's child, and I cannot understand a word she says !"

Huldah spoke with the quick irritation of exceeding pain.

The doctor answered soothingly, "She is talking of her mother, I think ; leave her to me a little while."

As Huldah left the room, he gently closed the door, then sat down by the bed-side, saying, musingly, "' La chiamo in van ;' how I used to sing that, after my Eurydice ! I wonder whether this little maiden will grow up to tear men's hearts. She ought to be something uncommon, with that fierce, tender aunt, and that craven fellow for a father. I wonder what would make me give up a child of mine, if I had one, a little daughter, even such a queer little lady as this, with her blue eyes shining out under her black eyebrows and fuzzy light hair. Heigh-ho ! I never had, never shall have, wife nor child ;

but there is one advantage in being a poor physician—no young woman will come and marry me against my will. Well, if there be any truth in my doctrine of sympathies, I ought to have dozed off the little one with this long muse. She really is quieter too, pulse steadier, skin rather moister. Now if that tempestuous aunt will only keep away, she may fall asleep."

Almost imperceptibly, slumber enwrapped the child. The little restless hands grew still, the forehead smoothed, and the long black eyelashes glistened with the dew of sleep.

"I think I may go now," said the doctor to himself. Opening the door, he found Huldah kneeling on the mat.

"Really, ma'am!" he muttered, impatiently.

"How is she?"

"Sleeping nicely."

"God be thanked!"

"If you could be quiet a moment," said the doctor pathetically.

She bent her head, in apology or acquiescence, and he went on to say, "An hour's sleep may save her. Watch outside the door—outside, mind, and directly she wakes send for me. I will find my way downstairs. I want to speak to the person in the shop."

He descended as he had said. The shop was one for the sale of ladies' shoes; its mistress, a Mrs. Smith, was a little woman, reminding one of a pincushion; round and soft, but suggestive of sharpness within. She had, however, a pleasant, unconscious smile.

"How is the poor little thing, sir?" she asked, as the doctor entered.

"She will recover, I believe, if she is kept perfectly quiet. There must be no noise in the house."

"No, sir," she answered, looking rather anxiously out at the door.

"You understand? no noise."

"Yes, sir, I quite understand; but the kitchen chimney is on fire, and some boys have sighted it, and I'm afraid they are gone for the engines. That's all, sir."

"See, mum! what it is to have presence o' mind."

The voice was startling, though the speaker proved to be only a rough-looking servant girl, and when she thrust a half-cooked leg of mutton into the doctor's arms, he drew back fiercely. Instantly, the girl's triumphant tone changed to one of wailing, as she said, "I've saved the dinner, mum, and the fire's all out."

"Oh, well, that's a good girl," said her mistress, while the doctor bustled off, saying, "I must stop those engines."

At the corner of the street he met them, with a following of huzzaing boys. He waved his hand, signing to the men to stop; but, of course, was unheeded; then, as they drew nearer, he stood facing them in the middle of the road, just in the path of the tearing horses. The boldness of this made the driver pull up, but only to inquire angrily why the madman could not get out of the way.

As is usual in London, a crowd sprang up in a moment, including a policeman, whose one idea for the smoothing of all difficulties seemed to be that somebody should give somebody else "in charge."

The mob began to regale itself with the relishing fun of baiting a well-dressed man, but the doctor; so testy in general, became, when he was really ill-treated, a mild Socrates, with a dash of Machiavelli.

He skilfully divided his foes: first enlisting the sympathies of the women on behalf of the sick child; then he won over the boys by a sly joke at the expense of the

policeman; then, just as the firemen felt themselves beaten, he said, "You shan't have had your work for nothing, my men. I certify that the fire is out, but there's five shillings for you to drink my little patient's health."

"All right, guv'nor; you ain't one of the shabby folks, neither," said the firemen.

The horses' heads were turned homewards, and the crowd melted into twos and threes.

The doctor went home to dinner, and was seated, comfortably dined and rested, when a messenger came from Huldah Owain, to say that the child had awaked.

Huldah met him at the room-door, saying, "She talks quite sensible English, but she is so fractious."

"Of course she is; we don't expect a child to wake like a Dutch cherub from brain fever: if she worries you crazy for the next week, it will be the best sign possible. There, that is right,—I knew you were a sensible woman, if you would only do yourself justice."

Huldah had given the child her draught with skilful gentleness.

"I am so lonely," said little Luigia with a strange, old patience in her voice.

"Do you want papa?" said the doctor, in the kindly tone he kept for his patients, especially the children.

"No—not papa."

"Who then?"

"Mamma." The little faint voice faltered, but the child did not cry.

The doctor looked troubled, and muttered, "Very clumsy of me, that."

Huldah said, "Did not dear mamma say that Aunt Huldah would love her little girl?"

"Yes ; how do you know ? you are not auntie, are you ?"

"Yes, darling. I am come to take care of you always."

"Oh, I am so glad ! But I am very lonely," she continued, her sigh of relief fading into one of weariness.

"The child has probably caught the phrase from her mother," said the doctor, turning away to be out of the hearing of the child.

"My poor Gwen ! she was too light-hearted to bear solitude well."

"How came she to marry that fellow ?"

"She was at school in London ; he was the dancing-master ; he must have bewitched her,—for her, so simple and so true, to deceive, not only the schoolmistress, but her father and I. And we loved her so ! We thought she was visiting a schoolfellow, when she had married Rameau, and left England."

"Had she beauty, or wealth, to tempt him ?"

"No, but her voice was magnificent, and he expected to make money by it. He forgot how young she was, and how loving. He took her to Italy to study, and the constant practising, with the home sickness, killed her in seven years."

"Her constitution must have been good to stand it so long."

"It was tenacious, but not elastic ; she did not readily fall ill when she was a child, but she was always slow to recover. What do you think her husband said of her death ?"

"Who knows ?"

"That it was very provoking, just as she was beginning to pay him back what he had spent on her training."

"The heartless rascal ! Did you hear from her after she left England ?"

"Only three times in all those weary years. She wrote to tell us she was married; then again when Luigia was born; and then, at the last, to say good-bye, begging me to watch over her child, and enclosing the London address to which Rameau meant to come."

"When was this?"

"Six months since; my father died just at the time. About a week ago Rameau wrote to me saying that the child was ill, and I came. I am glad she is mine now."

"You mean to adopt her entirely?"

"Certainly."

"Have you thought of the responsibility of all kinds? As to expense, for instance? Doctors may ask impertinent questions, you know."

"It was my year's income I gave to Rameau just now. Long ago, when I was my father's only child, he bought me an annuity for that sum, to commence when I was twenty-one. When Gwen was born my mother said it would have been better divided, but he laid his hand on my shoulder and said, 'I can trust my daughter to take care of her little sister.' I was seven years old then, and for twelve years Gwen and I were never parted—our mother died when she was a little year-old baby."

"How will you manage about money matters?"

"I shall teach, I suppose. It would simplify matters if I knew anything, but I don't."

"No languages?"

"Only Welsh, and who would want to learn that? or I could teach it well; my father was a Welsh preacher."

"You could not say clergyman, could you?"

"No."

This "No" of Huldah's the doctor had already

learned to dislike ; it was, though not disrespectful, certainly unrespecting, and he, like most irritable people, had a tender organ of "love of approbation."

Huldah seemed to feel that she had been ungracious, for she added, apologetically, "I should not have thought you would have cared."

"About distinctions of orthodoxy, eh? but a tea-dealer once told me that it was his half-ounce customers who were most particular."

"If you had known my father, and the work he did, you would not wonder at my resenting any change in him being suggested as an improvement."

"Well, I have a proposal to make. A friend of mine and I have been studying Welsh for some months : he with a view to an ancient British opera, which no manager will ever accept ; I, because philology happens to be a hobby of mine. We are stuck fast now for want of a master ; a professor we could not afford to pay, even if we knew where to look for one, but we would gladly give a guinea a week for, say, your Wednesday and Saturday evenings. Will you take this?"

"Will I double my income, by work I should like? Gladly ; but are you sure you are not creating this post for me?"

"Why should I? There,—there is no need to blush at suspecting me of a good action, though it is long since any one did so ; you would not, if you knew me better, but I have told you the simple truth. Signor Gondio, my friend, will be extravagantly grateful. By the way, he could keep up the child's Italian ; bring her with you when you come."

"When do you think she may get up?"

"In a week probably ; children rally so soon."

Thus recalled to the recollection of his little patient, the doctor was about to look at her again before taking leave, when the door opened suddenly and he muttered, "That floundering servant again!"

"What is it, Celia?" asked Huldah.

"I've got a kitten, mum, for little miss. I've washed it, and dried it, and tied a ribbind round its neck."

"I don't know which was the most cruel," said the doctor.

Celia instantly subsided into sobs. "I'm sure I didn't mean no harm, sir, but the child wanted a kitten, and I've been all over the neighbourhood for one, even be-meaning myself to No. 5, which I 'aven't spoke to for days, and my work all behind, and all."

"There, don't be dismal; there's a good young woman. It is a pretty kitten."

"Celia! is Celia there?" said the plaintive voice from the bed.

"Yes, missy," and the servant, her face finely enamelled with tears and dirt, took the child in her arms so fondly, that not only little Luigia forgot the enamel.

"Oh, what a dear little pussy!" she cried, as the kitten purred its satisfaction at the kisses pressed on its soft, furry head.

"What will you call him?" said Celia.

"Giovannito, I think,—Giovannito mio."

"Ain't that a hawful long name, if you should want him in a hurry?"

"Oh, I can call him Nito. I think I will, it is prettier."

"Well, good-bye, little sweetheart."

"Oh, Celia! you promised you would never tell."

"More I have, child; and it's a nice name, anyhow."

"But I told it you for a secret. Good-bye, Celia,"

and, turning her face away, the child murmured, "I am very lonely, Nito mio, very lonely."

"What was the secret?" said Huldah; "do not tell me if you would rather not, but I think you should know that I heard so much."

"What nonsense, with such a baby!" muttered the doctor.

"I will tell you, auntie. It was mamma's name for me—Sweetheart; but papa said it was folly, so we kept it to ourselves."

"Will you be my little sweetheart?"

"And mine," said the doctor; adding to himself, "What business is it of yours?"

Luigia looked from one to the other, with a grave air of scrutiny, and said,

"Yes—I love you—" She hesitated, then added "both."



CHAPTER II.

"TED."

"**D**ON'T believe nobody loves nobody, nor I don't, neither."

"Oh! little boy!" said Luigia.

"Little boy, indeed! Big enough to eat you up, any day."

"But you will not? Will you?"

Something that was neither innocence nor fun, but savoured of both, sparkled in the little speaker's eyes, and softened the young misanthrope. He replied,—

"No, I wouldn't eat you."

"Do you not love your mother?" she asked.

"Ain't got none. I've got a aunt—wish I hadn't."

"Is she not nice?"

"Nice! She's the worst woman that ever lived. You needn't stare so; I've heard tell of Jezebel and them, but I don't believe Jezebel ever married a potman."

"She was a king's wife."

"Was she? Well, I don't think much of kings, but they're better than potmen, anyhow."

"What is a potman?"

"Don't know that much! and set up to lecture me! Why, a man as goes round with beer-pots, to be sure. That's my uncle—ugh!"

"Do you go to school?" Luigia seemed to have taken to discourse categorical.

"Daresay!—stand so, and be a good little boy?—very likely!"

"Do you do anything?"

"That's good! Haven't I got my own living ever since I were eight year old? Tell you what, though, I like you."

"You don't talk as if you did."

"Not I—but I'll be friends, if you will. Take it, or leave it."

"Take what?"

"Blowed if I know! I'll shake hands, if you will,—mine's black enough."

"Oh, that does not matter."

The little pink hand forthwith lay cosily in the palm of the black one.

"Shan't I ever see you again, youngster?"

"Oh yes, I come here with auntie; we live near."

"Well, that's lucky; I might be tired of walking."

"Where to?"

"Why, to where you lived, wherever it was."

Just then Huldah and the doctor came upon the scene, which was the doctor's little town garden. Huldah looked rather grave at her niece, and said,—

"What boy is that?"

"Only Ted," replied the doctor, "my page, assistant, gardener; anybody I happen to want. He has no more manners than a kangaroo, but he is as faithful as a colley dog. I would trust him with the Koh-i-noor diamond,—or with my child, if I had one!"

Six weeks had passed since the crisis of Luigia's illness; she was quite well now, and her aunt had developed such a talent for teaching that the doctor, soliloquising, said, "How that woman has changed since she got rid of her brother-in-law! I thought she was of the crazy-Jane order of young persons, and now I am afraid she will turn into one of the strong-minded genera."

"Didn't the lady like me talking to the little one, sir?" said Ted, coming in.

"I don't suppose she thought much about it. How did you get on together?"

"Famous,—only, somehow, I fancy she's a bit of a Methodist'. I don't like them Methodisses. There was one lived in our house, an old man he was, with a parrot. I don't know which on 'em talked most stuff. One day, the parrot got shut up in the dark, and when my aunt went in with a light, he calls out 'Praise the Lord!' as hoarse as a Christian. Aunt said you might ha' knocked her down with the candle."

"Well, don't tell the child too many such stories, Ted; you must polish up a bit if you are going to be a young lady's companion."

"Say miss, and that, sir?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Accordingly, the next time Luigia found her way into the garden, Ted answered her first observation with "Yes, miss."

"What makes the trees so dirty?"

"London smoke, miss."

"What is your name?"

"Ted, miss."

"Why do you say miss, like that, Ted?"

"Thought I oughter."

"But it is so ugly."

"Glad you think so—I'll tell the doctor."

"I like Dr. Murray. Don't you?"

"Should think I did! Rather! Why, if it hadn't been for him, I should ha' been walking about here now a dead body."

"Oh, Ted!" cried Luigia, shuddering at the goblin presentment.

"Well, I should—I had typ'us fever, and he cured me."

"He says you may take me into the Park."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I'm willing. You wait here, while I go and change my jacket."

As they went along, Ted said, "What do you mean to be when you're a woman?"

Luigia rounded her great eyes, and answered, "Why, that will not be for ever so long. I think I should like to be an angel."

"Lor! that would be so flat. Now, when I'm a man I'm going to be a Chartist."

"What is that?"

"Well, they've been beaten,—that's one reason why I like them; and they want to put things to rights,—pull down the big people, and make us all equal."

"I should think *that* would be flat.—Oh, wait a minute, Ted! There's Mike; I know him."

Luigia ran up to a man with a fruit-barrow, saying, "How are you, Mike?"

Mike's Irish eyes twinkled with fun and apology, as he looked towards Ted, whose livery made him a gentleman to the old costermonger.

"Me and little miss is old friends, ye see, sir; she used to buy apples of me," said he.

"Sometimes for nothing, when I had no money," laughed Luigia.

The young embryo Chartist ended the interview as quickly as possible, and then reproved Luigia for her acquaintance.

"Very well, I will only laugh and nod next time; but don't you want Mike to be equal too?"

"You're a queer hand at a poser, little one; but I s'pose I oughtn't to ha' fired up about calling you miss."

The walk was a very pleasant one. Ted made walnut-shell boats obey Luigia's behests on the Ornamental Water in the park, and deluded the water-fowl into the belief that he was throwing them crumbs which mysteriously vanished; reducing one plethoric Muscovy duck to the verge of softening of the brain, through his efforts to solve the enigma by butting alternately at the tails of his companions and the bridge piers.

Then came a formidable band of cows, through which Ted gallantly convoyed Luigia, saying, "There ain't half as much fear o' them as there is of people. I like cows, and dogs, and things, a deal better than men and women."

"Oh, Ted! I don't; why do you?"

"Well, if they snarl, they do it, and ha' done with it; they don't keep all on botherin'. There's my aunt now; she's just like a wheel that's coming off,—it creaks and squeaks, and after all let's you down in the mud."

"There's grand wheels," said Luigia, "on that carriage."

"Lor, only yellor and red; you'll see plenty o' them any day."

"Why, the carriage is stopping, Ted."

"Waitin' to give us a lift, most likely."

Ted was somewhat discomposed to find his "most likely" verified : a canary-and-crimson footman came to say that "my lady wished to speak to the little girl."

"My lady" proved to be a comfortable-looking dame, who greeted Luigia with "My dear child, you are Luigia Rameau, I am sure."

"Yes," said Luigia, looking up, puzzled.

"Do you not remember us—in Milan, at the Signora Bertaldi's, where your mamma used to sing? She talked then of coming to London ; where is she?"

"Mamma is dead."

"Oh, poor little thing ! Jump in, I will take you home."

"Please 'm," said Ted, whose astonishment had for once quelled him, "I'm in charge of the young lady, to take her back to the doctor."

"Very well, you can tell Martin where to go.—Martin, make room for Miss Rameau's servant."

Neither Ted nor Luigia approved of the arrangement, but the lady seemed to regard the thing as done, and so she achieved it.

"Is the doctor a relation of yours?" she presently asked Luigia.

"No ; auntie goes on Wednesdays and Saturdays to teach him Welsh."

"Really? What a clever family they are ! Are they not, Sir William?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Would it not be an excellent thing for her to give Cecil some lessons? If he should ever own those slate-quarries, it would be so useful for him to know the language of the people."

"Certainly."

His election agents were wont to affirm that "Sir William Mabington was more a man of action than of speech." Lady Mabington combined both powers. She soon introduced herself to Huldah, and, finding the doctor to be no other than her own family physician, had made all requisite arrangements with her son's new instructress before her horses' heads were turned homewards.

Huldah was pleased with her growing success. When she and her little niece were at tea in their own rooms, she said, "We are going to be rich folks, I think, Sweetheart; what shall we do with the money?"

"Buy Nito a new collar, auntie."

"I am afraid he will not be grateful, but he shall have it."

"And lend Ted some books."

"So we will."

"And buy Celia some soap to wash her face with."

"You pussy-cat! I wonder how she came by her name."

"She is called Isabella Theresa, as well. Isn't it funny?"

"Well, yes, it is; but she is kind to Sweetheart."

"Oh yes! One day she took me out for a walk, and bought me a baked potato, and I ate it."

"In the street?"

"Yes. Did it matter, auntie?"

"Well, I daresay I should have recovered from the shock if I had met you; but I would not do so again."

"I will not."

The child's rare promises carried with them a singular trustworthiness. Huldah had found in her two precious

qualities, truth and steadfastness, but she was thoroughly a child.

"Auntie," she said presently, "I am seven years old, and I never had a doll; I shall be too old very soon."

"We will buy one to-morrow."

"Oh, do let's! Then it will keep me company while you go to Lady Mabington's? I suppose I must not go there?"

"No—I should like it, but it would not do."

"I don't mind very much.—Auntie, how old would mamma be now?"

"Twenty-five."

"She was younger than you?"

"Yes; do you want to find out the age of your venerable aunt?"

"I should like to know, if I might."

"Thirty-two, you little old lady."

"Auntie, mamma, dear mamma, was very, very beautiful, but you are beautiful too."

"I, my child?"

"Yes, up in your eyes, they are so big and so brown, and they change so, and all over your face you are pretty. I love you, my auntie Huldah."

"Little Luigia!"

The two, akin in mountain fervour, clasped each other with one of those close embraces wherein hearts grow together.

Meanwhile, Ted was dusting the doctor's books with a vigour that indicated a good deal of electricity in his moral atmosphere.

The doctor said, musingly, "I wonder what nation that child will choose to belong to when she grows

up? Born in Italy, of a French father and a Welsh mother."

"She made me feel to-day, sir, as if I wanted to kick somebody."

"How was that?"

"What she let out about her father. I was sayin' that a aunt was the prize patent invention for tormentin', and she says, just like a old woman, 'You don't know, Ted;' and says I, 'What's worser then?' and says she, speakin' low, like as if she was ashamed, 'A father.' And she went white and pinched-looking all in a minute. Wouldn't I ha' doubled him up if he'd come along just then!"

"You would have had to do it by butting at him then, Ted; your head is about up to his middle waist-coat button."

"Ain't you heard nothin' of his goings on, sir?"

"Mrs. Smith told me that when he was out, the child used to watch for him, with a pitiful, anxious look in her face; and of an evening, when he would let her, which was not often, she would sit at his feet, with one hand on his knee, till he smoked himself to sleep."

"Did he drink, sir? Most o' the bad men I knows on do?"

"No, he is not an Englishman, you know, though that might account for his queer fits of rage. When one of these seized him, he would come rushing down into the shop, to rave at Mrs. Smith about the windows not being clean, or some such rubbish, until, she says, she would have turned him out altogether but for the child, who used to stand, clenching her little hands to steady herself, with the great tears drying as they fell upon her cheeks, that were burning with shame. She must be an uncommon child, to feel the disgrace so young."

"Poor little one !"

"After one of these scenes, he would come bowing, and smiling, and toadying, till Mrs. Smith said she could have flung her work in his face."

"The crawlin' tyrant !" muttered Ted, doubling his fists so fiercely, that the doctor said, "I doubt if I have done right to tell you all this, Ted."

"You shan't ha' done wrong, sir. I ain't much of a chap to set up for a friend to anybody ; but I'll serve her faithful as long as I live, the poor little creature ! I—I arsk pardon, sir—back directly."

Ted stumbled out of the room, leaving the sound of a sob behind him.



CHAPTER III.

A QUIET EVENING.

LADY LOUISA MABINGTON came of a family which, since the ennobling of its founder, Sir Hugh D'Amorie, by Henry the Second, had taken its full share of most of the titles and dignities which English rank admits of. But for the last two hundred years the family fortunes had so decidedly set towards ebb, that the three last scions of the race, the Ladies Louisa, Marion, and Editha, resolved, before they were well out of the dreary nursery at D'Amorie Fens, that they would marry commoners.

The youngest, Editha, died, poor little lady, at the age of seventeen ; pining away for love of a handsome young guardsman, who would have given his beard to marry her, could he but have received an income in exchange for that appendage ; this being the only and all-potent difficulty in his way. But Editha died, and "Jolly Charley," as his brother officers called him, looked so excessively queer, that his creditors, not being romantic, supposed that his affairs must be embarrassed, and came

down upon him in such force, that poor Charley would have been hopelessly ruined, but for Sir William—then plain William—Mabington, who, as he simply expressed it, “put the poor little chap straight again;” and—what Charley valued more—helped him to a consulship at a Portuguese settlement in West Africa, where, as the miserable youth said, he could “die and have done with it.”

It seems almost superfluous to state that he did not “die and have done with it.”

The second sister, the Lady Marion D’Amorie, so perfectly fulfilled the purpose of her youth, that, as she confided to her sister in the early months of her marriage, she was continually imagining that people meant the butler when they spoke of her husband as “Mr. Griffiths;” but this small difficulty melted away in the real grief of her childlessness.

Morgan Griffiths, her husband, whose heart was as large as his slate quarries, and they covered one side of a mountain, tried to console his wife for their mutual disappointment by averring that she must take him for a son, and he would be well content with her for a daughter; but Lady Marion pined and drooped, till she faded into a mere shadow of the stately beauty she once had been.

Lady Louisa was unquestionably happy in her marriage, although, as she sometimes said, it was not fair of her husband to get himself knighted only five years after; but Sir William, though he did not care much for the knighthood, was proud of the occasion of it, when, by combining a special talent of his with a little patriotism, he had saved the Government, and through it the nation, from a mortifying dilemma.

Sir William’s peculiar gift can only be described as one

for planning anything, from a postage-stamp to a new nation; including such small matters as railroads and trading companies. He had planned himself into a large income, as well as his knighthood, and was withal an honest man; so, though he was, in the parlance of Young England, "the awfulest muff at a speech, and the slowest old bungler at all manly sports," he may fairly be esteemed worthy of respect. Assuredly, his wife thought so: a dissatisfied servant once complained that "what Sir William said, her ladyship always swore to," and, allowing for the superfluous energy of the description, it was correct. Their one difference of opinion just now was as to their only child, Cecil; Lady Louisa considering him absolutely perfect, and Sir William maintaining that "a boy of nine years old had no business with curls like floss silk, though they did look better since he had persuaded her to have them cut short, like other boys' hair." The child himself was chiefly distinguished at present by an aptitude, and consequent fondness, for the acquiring of foreign tongues, which his mother said, laughingly, would make him like that terrible youth who could say "Nothing" in fifty languages. In English he was, as yet, decidedly puzzling; his speeches generally contriving to hit so exactly the dividing line between the absurd and the sublime, that his father was always repenting of laughing at them.

About a month after the Welsh lessons had begun, as Sir William and his son were exchanging "Good-nights," Cecil said, "Don't you think, papa, it is a pity that we do not die directly we are born?"

Sir William, having a pleasant remembrance of some forty years of life, could not acquiesce in this Malthusian doctrine, so he asked, "Why?"

"Why, before we have done any harm. It is dreadful to get worse and worse, as nurse says I do; she says she can't think what I shall be when I am ten years old—that will not be for a long time, will it?"

"Not for three months, my boy; but you had better talk to mamma about it."

"Mamma" was appealed to by Sir William, directly the two were alone, to "tell nurse that she was not retained to make the child miserable;" but Lady Louisa laughed off his annoyance—assuring him that Cecil was quite able to hold his own against poor nurse, and that, in her sense of getting worse,—namely, more healthily troublesome,—he certainly progressed daily.

"But," said Sir William, "he does not seem to wish to live till his next birthday."

"He will, when we tell him of the pony that he is to have then."

"I am afraid he is too transcendental to care."

"He is matter-of-fact enough in some things: what do you think he told me the other day?"

"What?"

"That he thought twenty-five thousand a year was a very awkward amount for an income."

"He did?"

"Yes, the impertinent mannikin! I asked him why, and he said that it was not enough to keep up two establishments properly, and Aunt Marion was buried alive down there in Clyddfan."

"Do you think he has got hold of any notions about that estate?"

"I don't know; we can trust his gentlemanly instincts, even if he has."

"Yes, with all his queerness, he is a perfect little cavalier."

"His sweet temper helps him in that. The other day when nurse was exploding at him for 'wanting to know the why and the wherefore of everything,' he said, with a gentle considerateness that completely silenced her, 'I am sorry to vex you, nurse, but you see one must understand things.'"

"Little Cecil! But don't you really think it is bad for him to be made so much fuss with in Clyddfan?"

"As usual, husband of mine, we have been travelling in the same track. I was thinking that it would harm him less if he had something else to think of, so I asked his Welsh mistress to go with us this autumn, and save him from the terrible accent he is sure to pick up."

"Will she go?"

"If possible, she said she would."

"What is she like?"

"Not at all of the martyr-type of governess; a distinguished-looking woman. I feel like the plebeian when we stand together."

The smile of frank simplicity that accompanied these words might in itself have served for a patent of nobility. Notwithstanding her *embonpoint* and business manners, Lady Louisa had always that in her speech and bearing which indicated the truth—that she came of a race that had not been obliged to mince its words for many generations.

"Is Miss Owain poor?" said Sir William.

"Comfortably so, she calls herself. Dr. Murray has got her some translating to do for one of his friends. I asked her in a motherly way about her prospects when I called on her the other day. She opened a little Bible that was lying near her hand, and showed me that verse in the Psalms, 'Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt

thou dwell in the land ; and verily thou shalt be fed.' Then she said, with a graceful humility that took off the oddity of the thing, ' Sometimes we forget to trust, and sometimes we forget to do good ; but if we fulfil our part of the compact, we are safe.'

" People do not often act up to the Bible in that way, though I don't know why we should not ; but it is easier for women than for men."

" Why ? "

" They are naturally nearer heaven, my dear."

" You do not expect me to receive that as an argument ? "

" Well, you see, we men are continually doing, are almost obliged to do, things that will not agree with a very high standard ; and so, in time, we give the matter up altogether. Living is rather hard work, from Cecil's point of view."

" My poor tired knight ! " His wife's soft fingers smoothed away the tangle in Sir William's thick eyebrows, and he smiled at her restfully ; then, his thoughts glancing a little aside, he said, " I suppose we shall have seen enough of this famous Exhibition by August."

" Oh yes ; I did not tell you what Cecil said about it the other day. I was telling him of those fine old trees inside, just the thing, one would have thought, to delight him ; but he asked me, solemnly, if I did not think it was wrong to make God an exhibitor ? "

" Young rascal ! one never knows where to have him. I wonder what the Prince would say to that :—he is proud of his work, and not without reason. Peace and Progress are noble watchwords to stamp on a nation."

" Say that at your next meeting with your constituents."

" Ah ! it is so much easier to talk sitting than standing."

Directly I rise to make a speech, the faces I have seen quite well before all melt together in a milky haze; my voice sounds like the howl of a madman in my ears, though I know all the while that it is scarcely audible, and all my thoughts have a running accompaniment of 'I wonder how ever I shall get into my chair again! I should be grateful to any one who would take me by the two shoulders, and put me down.'"

"Who would suspect bluff Sir William Mabington of nervousness?"

"No one, I suppose, but his wife, and she would believe anything of him."

"Yes, except a bad thing."

The coming Exhibition was the subject of conversation in many houses during that April of 1851. Among others, in that of Dr. Murray, where Huldah and Luigia, with Signor Gondio, were spending an evening in chat. The doctor had just been reading out of Chaucer's "House of Fame" the passage which so singularly foretells the building.

"—like a lymed¹ glas
But that it shone full more clere."

"As modern glass does," said the doctor: "singular for that old Londoner to have had such a vision five hundred years ago: all nations meeting in it too."

"Is Chaucer as old as Taliesin, auntie?" said Luigia, who, like most solitary children, had an appetite for out-of-the-way bits of knowledge.

"Oh no, he is only old for an English bard: Taliesin lived in Carnarvonshire eight hundred years before."

¹ Polished.

"With what gusto the Signora says that," said Signor Gondio, roguishly.

"Yes, and so presumptuously fixes the date of a poet who is as much of a myth as Homer."

For this speech the doctor was rewarded, as he probably meant to be, by a lively chorus of reproofs, beginning with the Signor's "Oh, dottore, 'Omer a myth!"

"Well, who was he?"

"Melesigenes," said Huldah.

"Mæonides," said the Signor, adding "or Ulysses himself."

"Just so; or King Solomon apostatised; or a school-master in Smyrna. Luckily, the works of the seven ancient Greeks who wrote concerning his identity have all perished."

"But yet we have the Iliad," said Huldah.

"Just so, and somebody must have written it,—I grant you that much; but see, now, what an unmanageable thing conversation is. I decried Taliesin in hopes of stimulating you into giving us some Welsh stories, and you perversely ride off upon Homer. Was Greek one of the amusements of your most uncommon childhood?"

"No, astronomy was my father's pet study; almost the first thing I can remember is, his fixing two balls to the ends of a stick, to make me understand the perturbation of the earth's orbit."

"Sounds like rope-dancing," said the doctor; "I can't fancy our steady old earth jogging along on a perturbed pathway; but then I never took to astronomy, it always made me feel as if all the planets were bumping about my ears."

"You would have liked it with him," said Huldah; "his enjoyment of those calm grand laws was infectious."

His studies cost him dear too: an old Blainoriadd, a kind of Presbytery, passed a vote of censure upon him for asserting that the world was not made in a week; six days, they read it in Genesis, and six days it should be; and though he brought forward the text, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years" it would have ended in his expulsion I believe, but that the younger members of the congregation took the matter up, and threatened, I don't exactly know what, unless he was let alone; and let alone he was accordingly."

"What did you do for books up there among the mountains?" said the doctor, dismissing the "Blainoriadd" with a significant shrug.

"For as long as I can remember, we had the use of the vicar's library, which was unusually well-stocked."

"The vicar's?"

"Yes, he and my father were sworn friends. He could not afford to quarrel with the only conversible man in his parish because he was a dissenter."

"How came your father to be one?"

"He said chiefly for two reasons: that he had neither time nor money to spend in becoming a clergyman, and that the English Church was virtually useless among the people. But he was never rabid on the subject. He used to say that he could no more consider the Church system as forbidden in the Bible than as commanded."

"One would expect a man of his stamp to suffer in changing his form of worship."

"I believe he did when he was young. Once he walked seventy miles to hear a famous preacher, and found him just dead. In returning he lost his way, and strayed to the foot of a rock, over which fell a grand waterfall. He was tired, and lay down to rest himself

with the sight of its beauty ; the soft splashing of the falling water lulled him to sleep, and when he awoke the sun had worked round, so as to form a rainbow in the spray. He saw—he never would say more than that he saw—formed in prismatic letters, the words ‘ Fear not, only believe.’ The impression of peace remained with him as long as he lived.”

“Queer, that. He should have been a terribly unpractical man.”

“He was not ; he devoted himself specially to battling with real evils. Once he lived for a year in that dreary Moelfra, Red Wharf Bay, with the purpose of converting the wreckers who infested all that side of Anglesey. He succeeded too.”

“He must have been brave, to settle himself among a people with the avowed intention of destroying their business.”

“He was brave. I remember hearing of one time when he would go to try and stop one of the Sunday fairs for hiring that used to be held. They warned him that he would be stoned to death ; but he quietly got upon a mounting block and preached, till one after another, sellers and buyers, stood round him in tears. There was never another Sunday fair held in the place.”

“Sunday fairs ! I never heard of such a thing ; the people must have been almost heathens.”

“Yes ; it is different in these days. Long before my father died he used to say, laughingly, ‘ I can afford to preach a missionary sermon now.’ ”

“Did he ? ”

“Yes : there was one that his people talk of still. There had been fear that a mission to Africa must be abandoned for want of funds, and he agreed to preach

for it. He ended his sermon with a kind of simple parable on the old road across Pen-maen-mawr, a rock which ends the Carnarvonshire mountains where they run into the sea. It was a dangerous road, and people often perished there. He likened it to the world, and described three travellers passing along. The first was a bold, bad man, who declared that he could find his way, and would heed no warnings ; he went over the precipice, cursing in death. The second was a dreamy poet (and the Welsh bards are very dreamy) ; he fell asleep on the road, and in his sleep slid down the rock into the sea. The third was a blind man, who would have taken a guide, but there was none ; he grew bewildered, wandered from the path, and perished, calling for some one to lead him, but there was no one. 'There was no guide' seemed the very cry of desolate heathendom. I have told enough Welsh now," concluded Huldah, as she rose to say "good night ;" "but I like Sweetheart to know what her grandfather was."

"Yes," said the doctor ; "it is good to know that such men live. Thank you, Huldah."

It was the first time that he had called her by her name. Huldah liked it. There are men from whom what would be an impertinence in others comes as a compliment.

Huldah went home with a strange new feeling of peace and rest warming her heart, as though a dove sat there. It was even more tenderly than usual that she kissed Luigia before leaving her for the night, and as she came downstairs she lingered in the soft quiet moonlight, with a half-conscious repugnance to open the door of her little gas-lit parlour. When she did so, it seemed as though the feeling had been a presentiment, for there

sat Rameau. He attacked her at once with "Your portress was unwilling to admit me."

"She was right," said Huldah, so quietly, that an uneasy shade passed over his face.

He continued: "I have a *pension* at Havre; one of the pupils, *un Anglais*, was ill; so I brought him home. Was not that kind of me?"

"No."

"How can you tell?"

"There are things impossible."

"Well, of course his parents pay my expenses, and I thought I could come and see how you were, and—" he hesitated, then added, "and Luigia."

"It was not necessary."

"If this is all the welcome you have to give me, I may as well depart."

"I think so."

Huldah held her room-door open for him, and Rameau passed out, with the air of defeat which was his form of civility. On the mat was seated Nito, Luigia's little kitten, who had already begun to assume the airs of a fop, and was lazily brushing his whiskers with one paw, while he rested on the other three. In passing, Rameau's foot touched him slightly, as it seemed, but the malignant, weak nature of the man had consistently concentrated itself in the thrust. The little cat staggered to Huldah's feet, and fell.

"Oh, poor little Nito!" she said, in tones so indignant and so tender, that the fast closing gray eyes opened again with almost a human smile. In another instant Nito was dead.

Huldah shuddered, and hurried back to see if Luigia had heard anything. It was as she feared: the child

sprang to her, crying, "Auntie, I heard papa; you will keep me, won't you?"

"Always, my darling, God helping me."

"I did ask Him, but then I heard papa talking. Oh auntie, don't let me go back to him; save me, auntie!"

"Hush, sweet, don't cry so; he is gone. I think he will not come again; we will go away from here, where he cannot find us. My pet, try to hold still."

The little hands were icy cold, and the child was trembling with short, convulsive jerks. Huldah felt curiously unwilling to send for the doctor, but she grew frightened; so she rang, and told the ever-faithful, ever-blundering Celia to go for him.

"Yes 'm," said the handmaiden. "I'll have him here directly. Missus said I was to ask if you could step downstairs."

"No, auntie, no; don't leave me."

"Auntie could not leave her little girl; tell your mistress so, Celia."

"It is only because missus found the kitten—"

"Go!—do you hear?" broke in Huldah, half repenting her imperiousness as the retreating Celia sobbed out, "If I was born stupid, how can I help it?"

The doctor soon quieted Luigia, saying, in reply to Huldah's inquiry, "It is hysteria; the chief danger is of its becoming a habit. If women knew how injurious that is, they would never yield to it."

"What will be a safeguard?"

"Thorough change of air and scene would be the best."

"Lady Mabington has asked me to go with them in August."

"Cecil ought to go sooner."

"They cannot leave town."

"But you could take him—they would be grateful."

"I should not like to propose it."

"I will then, and promise you to report faithfully if her ladyship is not wise enough to jump at the offer."

"But to take Luigia?"


"A child of that age is always an acceptable plaything in a childless household; besides, do you not know the proverbial hospitality of your nation? It will be the very thing for you."

"And for me, too," the doctor added, musing as he went home; "a month or two's absence will cure me of this folly."



CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MOUNTAIN.

“H, Sweetheart, I wonder if lowlanders can feel for anything like what we do for the mountains.”

“Is that the Risl, Aunt Huldah, that you told me about?”

“Yes, my dear, old purple Risl. Perhaps some day you may go up to the top of it, and look down on the little green valley where grandfather lived—such a gem of a place, running from the mountain to the sea.”

“I love the mountains, auntie; they seem somehow just like relations.”

“So they are, my pet; they nourished and influenced your grandfather, more than any of his real relations that I ever heard of.”

“You never told me of any.”

“He had only one sister and one brother; the brother went to America, and died there, I believe, leaving one child, a son.”

“And the sister?”

“I will tell you about her when you are a little older; hers is a sorrowful story.”

"I like sorrowful stories, auntie."

"It makes a difference when they belong to one, though.—What are Cecil and you going to do this afternoon."

"We are going up Careg-y-fran ('The Crow's Rock')—Cecil knows the way, he has often been."

"Very well, do not lose yourselves, that is all."

Huldah and Luigia had spent two happy months at Clyddfan; of course, the two children had chosen each other as future husband and wife, but the elders wisely concerned themselves very little about that; for the present, they were the best possible companions for each other.

The Careg-y-fran was a little mountain, growing out of a larger one, where Cecil had once found some crystals, when the cutting for slate had first begun there. Now there were no crystals, but there were other treasures; pieces of slate and stone, showing wonderful specimens of nature-printing; the delicate ferns marked on them having every frond pencilled out as though the leaf lay there; only colour was lacking. In another they came upon some porous, crumbling bits of rock, which Cecil, with precocious sophistry, first assumed to be lava, and then deduced therefrom the presumed fact that the Rifi was an extinct volcano. Luigia liked the idea of a burning mountain, and so perceived no fallacy; she only "wished it would catch fire a little bit now, to light them home," for one of the sudden mountain fogs had arisen, and they could not see a yard before them.

"Never mind," said Cecil, "this sheep-track is a near way. I remember coming by it last year, when Aunt Marion brought me, and we wanted to get home quick."

He had scarcely spoken when he started as though he had been stung ; Luigia sprang forward to see what was the matter, and, as he snatched her to him, gave a low, shuddering exclamation that echoed his. They were within a few feet of a precipice.

To spring back and crawl together up the shelving path was the work of a moment ; then, when the hush of awed relief was breathed away, Luigia said, " Do you think God was asleep, Cecil ? "

" No, or else we should have gone right over. "

" What made the path lead us there ? "

" The quarrymen must have blasted away the rock only lately, so that the grass has not had time to cover up the track. "

" We should have been killed, shouldn't we ? "

" Yes ; once Uncle Morgan said that it was ninety feet from the surface of the mountain to the first ledge. "

" What do you mean by surface ? "

" Why, upon the face—where we are. "

" The ledge is where the men stand to cut ; isn't it ? "

" Yes. "

" How funny it would have been if we had come tumbling down upon them ! " Luigia spoke between little peals of hysterical laughter.

" Oh, Sweetheart, don't you frighten me, " pleaded Cecil.

She began whimpering ; then saying, with a pettishness most unlike her, " I thought if I was your wife you would take care of me. "

" Let us ask God to. "

" Yes. "

So, in the deepening darkness, the two knelt down, while Cecil, said, " Pray, God, take care of us, because we have

lost our way, and we are foolish and weak, and they will be so sorry at home if we never go back any more. Hear us, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

Then Luigia crept into his arms, and said, "I will not be a naughty wife any more."

Cecil, looking round for possible help, presently cried, "See, darling, there is a light down there ; it is in a house I am sure, it is so still—come."

"Oh no, I dare not move."

"But look, this other path leads just that way, and we will watch where we go. I would carry you, only I can't."

"No ; I will walk. Oh, won't it be nice to be at home again ?"

Slowly and cautiously they set off, almost creeping at first, but gaining heart and speed as the path widened, till at last it led them, as Cecil had hoped, to a farmhouse.



CHAPTER V.

IN A WELSH FARMHOUSE.

“**N**OW shall we ask our way?” said Luigia.
“I can’t think of any Welsh, only ‘Nos da’wch’ (Good-night); I must say that,” said Cecil.

Accordingly, the farmer’s wife, so busily frying *crempoga* over the fire that she did not hear the door open, was suddenly startled by hearing, close at her elbow, a faint little ‘Good-night.’ She dropped into a chair, calling out, “Evan, Evan, y tylwth-y-teg” (The tribe of the ten).

Evan, her husband, came with a smiling “Dim tylwth-y-teg, wraig bach” (No tribe of the ten, dear wife). Then, addressing the children in English, he said, “Where do you come from, little people?”

With an air of relief, Cecil said, “From Clyddfan; my uncle is Morgan Griffiths, of Clyddfan. We lost our way on the mountain.”

“Is this your sister?”

“No, I am Luigia Rameau; auntie brought me here; my grandfather was Elias Owain.”

"Elias Owain the preacher?"

"Yes."

"How very, very strange!"

"What is strange?"

But here the "little wife" struck up a great bustle, insisting on the children's eating crempoga, a kind of beatified muffin, while she dried their wet clothes. Presently, she said something very earnestly to her husband, who translated it by saying, "My wife wants you to know that she does not believe in the *tylwth-y-teg*, though her mother did, but she was so frightened by your sudden coming, that she did not know what she said."

"What does it mean?" asked both children at once.

"The tradition is, that when Christ healed the lepers, and only one returned to thank Him, the others were changed into little imps, condemned to live for ever in the marshy places of the earth, only to come out in misty weather, when they take the form of children they have stolen."

"It is rather a pretty story," said Cecil, critically.

"Yes, but we cannot afford to see the beauty of the superstitions we have only just escaped from."

Just then the wife brought out a large silver medal from somewhere, and pointed to it, with an air of importance.

"What is that?" said Luigia.

"A prize from the Eisteddfod."

"Oh, auntie told me of them; did you get it for a poem?"

"Yes, it was for a poem."

"Do tell us about it," said Cecil, who had a passion for getting inside any authorcraft.

"See, the gig is ready, I will take you home now; we

can talk going along. Say 'Diolch yn vawr i chwi' (Thank you, greatly)," he said, laughingly, to Luigia, taking her to receive his wife's parting embrace. Luigia obeyed, with a merry exaggeration of her difficulty in pronouncing.

"Ynghariad bache" (My little Sweetheart), was the wife's reply, so tenderly spoken that the words sounded as mellow as the child's native Italian.

As they went along, Cecil said, "Please tell us what your poem was about."

"It was upon the earth before man."

"Why what could you say about that? Wasn't it a funny thing to make poetry on?"

"Not as I read it here among the mountains. Those were mighty ages. Now, the old Mother Earth is like a hen with her chickens on her back; she scarce dare move, for fear of hurting us. But then she could stretch herself freely, and raise up, here a mountain, and there an island; it must have been grand for the angels to see."

Evan drew a long breath as of enjoyment.

"You are a wonderful man, sir," said Cecil.

"I, my child? No; I am not even a good farmer, or else my land and I have not yet contrived to understand one another."

"Will you come and see Aunt Huldah?" said Luigia, when they reached Clyddfan.

"No, thank you, little one; but ask her to come and see me before she leaves Wales; you can tell her where."

"Who shall I say?"

"Evan Prys, of Ty Cefn."

The children ran in, full of their adventure, but found an opposition excitement, in which they were glad to

join. Sir William and Lady Mabington had arrived unexpectedly, bringing with them no less a person than Dr. Murray.

"I knew you would forgive me for bringing him without leave," said Lady Louisa, when she and her sister were alone.

"Of course ; does he always look so worn ?"

"No, he has not been well, I think. He came in to us last evening, saying that he was starting for Wales, on a moth hunt. He is crazy just now about entomology,—says that we might foretell and guard against epidemics by watching the insect developments of different miasma. I told him we had suddenly decided to leave this morning, and he had better come with us."

"Quite right ; a clever professional man is always an acquisition down here."

"If he will only brighten up, and show you his real self. Sir William asked him what had been the matter, and he said only a battle with certain febrile forces. I inquired if he was victorious. He said he did not know ; he rather thought his case resembled that of the Irishman who passed three public-houses, and then went into the fourth 'to reward resolution.' That was all we could get out of him, except that it was an old story,—whether he meant himself or the Irishman I do not know."

"Has he a good practice ?"

"I fancy it is improving. We tell every one how much better we are under his hands ; it is so delightful to have a doctor who aims at the minimum of doctoring."

"Yes, that must help him in the end, though it may have kept him back hitherto. How old is he ?"

"Thirty-eight, he said one day, apropos to some-

thing, I forget what. But now, tell me you will return with us, will you not? to see our Great Exhibition."

"It has been a success?"

"Perfectly. Do you know, Marion,—it was awfully foolish of me, but I went there with Cecil on the first shilling day, and indulged in a quiet cry behind a statue."

"The excitement of the crowd, perhaps."

"Partly, I suppose, though I had seen it more crowded; but there was something in the hush which seemed to fall on the people as they entered, and in the quiet reverence with which a rough-looking mechanic said to his little daughter, 'Your day will be better than ours, Susie.'"

"Did the people behave well?"

"Admirably, especially the class that seemed to predominate on that day—the London workmen. It was fine to see those of different trades exchanging information, and all uniting to admire such art as went beyond them. Any kind of music, of course, drew its own crowd; once, after some selections from Mendelssohn's 'Hymn of Praise,' I heard a man say, quietly and seriously, 'Don't you think, Bill, we may be in the millennium without knowing it?'"

"They are an interesting class, those London operatives."

"Yes, but they have a healthy dislike to being looked at in that light. I think a man does, naturally, object to be regarded as a specimen, a kind of object for moral microscopes."

While this chat was going on, Huldah was trembling at her little niece's account of the afternoon's peril; when it was ended, she said, "God was very good to us, my darling."

"Shall Cecil and I be ill, do you think, auntie?"

"I hope not, if you have a warm bath to-night, and stay in bed to-morrow morning."

"Oh, I don't want to."

"Things will be as they must, you know."

"I would ask the doctor, only he would be sure to say what you said."

"You are saucy enough to be well, little puss; but it is best to err on the safe side."

"You will want me to show you the way to Ty Cefn."

"No, I can find that."

The next morning Huldah went, and the farmer-bard said, "Is it so that you are the daughter of Elias Owain?"

"Yes."

"I am his nephew."

"His nephew?"

"Yes, the only son of his sister, Elin."

Huldah was silent a moment; then, holding out her hand, she said, "I am glad to know you, my cousin."

"You have heard my mother's story?"

"Partly."

"How much of it?"

"That she came to London, as maid to the Duchess of Clieveland, who had taken a fancy to her, and that—"

"Well?"

"That, not long after, she forged her mistress's name."

"Shall I tell you the whole story?"

"Yes, please."

"She is dead now, and my father. Not till then did I leave South Wales. She would remain there, so as not to disgrace her brother, she said."

"He thought her dead."

"So she wished. She died before him too; about two years ago."

"Poor Aunt Elin !"

"You acknowledge her at once ; that is a true Owain—proud-mannered, but not proud-natured."

"My prayer for years was, that God would humble me."

"And He has ?"

"Yes, not as man would, by humiliation, but by blessing ; so that my pride died for want of opposition ; but tell me about my aunt."

"One day, just as she was coming out of the Duchess's doorway, a man rushed past her into the hall, shut the door, and knelt down before her, saying, 'Save me, save me.' He told her that he was Rathbone, an infidel lecturer and publisher, so celebrated that she had already heard of him, and also that the Bow Street runners were after him, for issuing impure books. She hid him for an hour or two in a little ante-room. She was wrong in so doing, of course."

"Yes, but it is so natural for a woman to shelter anything hunted."

"When it seemed safe she let him out, hoping never to see him again ; but he came a day or two after, to thank her he said ; and perhaps that was all he meant at first, but he was greatly in need of money to help him to escape to America, and he fell upon a cruel plan to get it. He used to lead her on to talk about the Duchess, among other things how beautifully she wrote, and he offered to teach my poor mother to write just like her, if she could get some of her mistress's writing to copy. She did so, and progressed so well that he petted her with praise, and brought her a strange-looking paper, telling her what to put on it. Even she knew she was doing wrong when it came to signing her mistress's name, but she did not know really what she had done, till she

found herself in custody for forging a cheque for five hundred pounds. Rathbone had presented it, and received the money: suspicion was soon aroused, and some of the under servants had noticed little things which, all together, proved that the forgery was hers."

"Where was Rathbone?"

"He got as far as Liverpool; there he was tracked and brought back. In the court he declared on oath that 'the little Welsh girl had been a child, an idiot, in his hands;' then shot himself, falling dead before them."

"What became of her?"

"After a while she was released, and an old lover, my father, came forward, married her, and took her home to South Wales."

"What a noble fellow!"

"Yes, in that, and he never once alluded to past shame, but he was curiously hard and mean in most things. When he was dying, he asked my mother to bury his pillow with him. She promised, and after his death was going to do so, when the old nurse, struck by the weight of it, said, 'You never promised not to open it,' and persuaded her to do so. Among the feathers they found five hundred sovereigns, with a piece of paper on which was written, 'I forgive my wife, if she has opened the pillow. This money I gathered, by hard savings, to pay back the Duchess of Clieveland; but now that the last sovereign is there, I cannot part with it.' That was all—a space was left, as though he had meant to add some instructions, but could not resolve on them."

"What became of the money?"

"My mother took it to the Duchess, who at first declined to receive it, and behaved very kindly; but I think it killed her—my mother—the opening of the old

wound, while her heart was yet bleeding from the new, deep one, my father's death. She only survived him about six months."

"My poor Aunt Elin!"

Silently, for a while, the two mused over the troubled life-story. Then Huldah said, "We will keep our cousinhood alive now; you will write, will you not, in case I never come to Wales again?"

"Truly, since you wish it."

She gave him a card, and they parted.

As she went down the mountain, Huldah stayed to watch a deep, little river, which was brawling over the stones with a most enjoyable clamour. The noise of the water prevented her from hearing footsteps, and she started when Dr. Murray's voice, close to her, said, "Wait a bit, we shall see the salmon leap."

They stood still, and presently came a splash, followed by the glistening of a silver arch above the water; it quivered there a moment, then resolved itself into a quiet salmon, floating deep down in the clear stream.

"What a lovely place he has to live in!" said Huldah.

"Yes, it sets one thinking how the world has been twice discovered by a dove."

"I remember being so struck when I first noticed that that was the meaning of Columbus—our Welsh word for dove is similar."

"How quickly you read one's thoughts!" The doctor spoke in the low tone of perfect content.

"That is a happy thought, as suggesting the gentleness of the Creator. I find that everywhere though."

"Yes, not only in your favourite astronomical motions, so harmonious and so still; but it might be a lesson to some preachers, to see how the Bible glances aside from

unedifying horrors. That account of the flood, for instance, written by a man, would make one's hair stand on end ; as it is, a child may read it."

"I think we are meant to be happier than we are."

The doctor did not receive this as a truism ; he said, "Yes, just now, we two may be absolutely happy, and—I will." The "I will" had a strange, defiant earnestness running through it, like a silver wire through pearls ; but he went on, lightly, "See ye disturb us not, ye busy salmon, but leave us to the drowsiness of pleasure."

"What are you talking about?" said Huldah, laughing a child's laugh at the fierce energy of his "drowsiness."

"Fact, I tell you ; for just this shred of time I choose to be a lotos-eater ; of artistic tendencies, though I must have my picture arranged."

"How?"

"I will show you. Sit down on that flat rock, will you? with the brim of your hat just shading your face, so. Now, the eye of my landscape is in ; stay just so, and watch the salmon, while I lie here on my elbows, lazzaroni-fashion, and watch—"

He did not say what, but Huldah felt, till, as his gaze continued, the quick blood flushed up into her throat and face, and her eyes grew dim. Then he bent his head down, down to the hem of her dress, and laid a kiss there ; a still passionate kiss, pressing the soft fibre on to the grassy spears. For a while they rested thus, so still, in the hush of the sunshine, that a little wild mountain sheep came and nibbled the grass before them. Resting, these two, in a brief trance of peace, as he had said, snatched out of the dry unquiet of their lives,—then, in his ordinary manner, the doctor gave Huldah his hand to

raise her. "We have been to the lotos land, and those who travel together grow strangely familiar ; may I call you Huldah always ? "

" I should like it," she said, with her wonted simplicity.

" You have a singular child's trust in me."

" Yes."

" You may have"—he closed his eyes for an instant, as though to shut in a thought ; then releasing her hand said, " Good-bye, Huldah—Huldah."

That night, Luigia said, " Auntie, your pretty mouth looks as though it wanted to cry."

" Shall I try if it can sing ? "

" Oh yes, the ' Morva Rhuddlan.' "

The dignified, pathetic lament suited the singer and her mood. She sang it so that she found the maids clustered round the door when she left the room ; but Huldah was neither flattered nor annoyed, she had been the half-conscious recipient of that kind of involuntary homage, ever since the far off time when she, a baby beauty, had been taken to cheer the old and the sick, as with a vision of joy.



CHAPTER VI.

EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY-TWO.

TED at fifteen was no more like Ted at fourteen than a chicken is like an egg.

For one thing, he was taller, and, as his aunt said, "more shapeable;" for another, he was better-looking. His eyes had always been, as eyes should be, the most noticeable feature in his face; large, dark, and—rare combination!—both soft and brilliant; but now they had the setting of a clear, fresh skin, for Ted had conceived a passion for cold bathing. His hair had never been sleeked down criminal fashion, but it had struck into the opposite extreme, and been wont to stand so erect, that, according to the doctor, "Ted looked like the sign of the Sun Fire Office, or as though he had just come on a comet from the planet Mars." But the substitution of brushing for pomatum had given the dark, glossy waves almost the softness of Cecil Mabington's fair curls; not quite,—happily for Ted; it was a true instinct which made Sir William dislike his son's silky hair. Inside the head, a greater change had been going on. The boy had shown himself such a quick

reader, and careful handler, of the books lent him, that the doctor fell into Huldah's custom of always letting him have one on hand, and the fruits thereof were visible in his speech. The consonants *h*, *r*, and *g* after *n*, no longer led a nomadic life, but had settled down on their proper syllables, and at length it was even possible to guess from Ted's pronunciation of a word what vowels went to the composition of it. But he retained his old grotesqueness of expression, and lack of reverence for dignities. Sir William Mabington took him one night to hear a great Parliamentary debate, and he described it as "awfully like a row, all but Gayrock's speech—Demosthenes could scarcely have beaten that, only he would not have looked all the while as though it was his last dying speech and confession."

They went early, and Sir William left Ted to amuse himself in the outer lobby, where he was nearly knocked over by a great law lord and a big county member, each hurrying to their respective houses. The county member bustled on, but the other stayed to give Ted a comical glance of sympathy, which emboldened him to say—"Those big people always remind me of my aunt making biscuits, sir."

"How is that?" said the law lord, looking amused.

"Why, when she is in a good humour, she always makes biscuits, but her temper never lasts out till she's done; so she takes all the last of the dough, a great lump, and sticks a little lump on the top of it; then she says, 'That's a biscuit, ain't it?' and of course it isn't, you know, sir—neither bread nor biscuit; it's never half baked neither, just like them."

"The small lump represents the big man's head, I suppose?"

"Yes, I never heard of a thorough mess yet but what a big man with a little head had something to do with it."

"How old are you?"

"Just fifteen, and I've seen plenty of muddles."

"You will see plenty more if you keep your lantern burning, young Diogenes. Good-bye." And the peer hurried away, almost too late to make the speech which gained the measure of his party.

About this time was made another change, which to Ted himself seemed most important. His livery had always been the faintest indication of one, but the doctor, who had only laughed at his protégé's uppishness while it was expressed in bad grammar, now began to indulge it; so he said one day, "You go to the tailor's this morning, don't you, Ted?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I don't see the use of all those buttons on your jacket; tell him to make you a suit like other boys' clothes."

"For always?"

"Yes."

To the doctor's astonishment, Ted's face showed signs of struggling tears, while he said, "I will never forget it, sir."

"What,—the buttons?"

"The leaving off livery: I—well—I hated it."

"Well done, Ted. I never knew anybody worth much that could not hate—only let it be things always, not persons."

"You have been so kind, I should like to tell you a secret, sir."

"As a reward, eh? Well, how many people know it?"

"No one. I could not tell my aunt, she would find ingratitude in it, if it was having a tooth out."

"A woman in the wrong is always in the accusative case; but how did you keep the matter from the 'little one,' as you call her?"

"I did offer to tell her once, but she said she must let her aunt know."

"Well, will you bargain to be very attentive if ever I tell you a secret?"

"I could not laugh at you, sir."

"And I ought not at you, eh?—but my Puritan progenitors cut grim jokes as they were going to execution, and the habit seems to have descended."

"I thought the Scotch were Covenanters?"

"In Scotland, yes; but we were Scots in England—quite a different race. The Scot in Scotland has not stamina enough for much more self-assertion than consists in assuming the airs of a millionaire if he has five pounds in his pocket; but the Scot in England, fed for a generation or two on beef instead of porridge, becomes a very different animal, with horns, and a tendency to use them; really formidable, you know."

"He is the best friend I ever had."

"Never give a conversation a personal turn, Ted; you stop it directly,—which perhaps was just what you wanted for your secret—eh?"

"Maybe you will not care about it, sir."

"I shall not in five minutes' time."

"I must fetch it."

"Very well, run now."

"I wonder what the lad's secret is," said the doctor to himself; "fire-works, or a guinea-pig, or Miss Mary Jane, with 'Ask your consent, sir.' He is quite queer and precocious enough for either."

Ted came presently, bearing what, to the doctor's

near-sighted eyes, looked like a dark blotch on white paper ; his glass, however, enlightened him, and he said,

"Why, where did you get this? It is a very good water-colour drawing—very good? it is something more than that." The subject was a branch of blossoming ivy. Ted was silent, and the doctor continued: "He was an artist, Ted, whoever did this; that firm brown stalk, and these glossy dark leaves seeming to shelter the blossom—surely the frailest little flower that blooms is that of the ivy. The colouring is not bad either; that faint, green corolla, with the yellow-tipped stamens;—where did you get it?"

"I did it."

"You? nonsense—where could you get materials?"

"I took all the money I had to the artist's shop in Rathbone Place, and the master gave me nearly everything under price; he did."

Ted's eyes were filling at the remembrance of this, the first kindness in his art life.

The doctor's manner grew suddenly serious, he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and said, "Then you are a genius."

"Do you really think so, sir?" said Ted, with a modesty most unlike him.

"Many will think so, some day. We will make a man of you; Sir William Mabington will help us as to the Schools of Art. Ted, my boy,—my dear old fellow, I am glad of this."

Ted returned the hand pressure, and then—after all, he was only fifteen—he went to his own little room, knelt down, and cried.

The doctor took the drawing to Sir William, who willingly promised what help was needed, but suggested that the young student should turn his attention to drawing figures. Ted tried, but said that "they wouldn't come."

"Evidently," said the doctor, "he has a specialty for plants."

"But," said Sir William, "is not that rather unfortunate?"

"I don't know—who ever cared about dogs, before we had Landseer; or for cattle, until yesterday this young Frenchwoman astonished us all? Any gift creates its own demand."

Lady Louisa was always doing good-natured things, under pretence of amusing herself; so now she proposed having Ted to her house some evening, to give him a few introductions; but, to every one's astonishment, Ted, whose usual fault was certainly not shyness, said that he would rather not.

"Why?" said the doctor.

"I shouldn't like anybody who might know me by-and-by to see me while I am so raw."

"You would not have said that a year ago, Ted, and that shows the improvement in you; something has refined you."

"I think it is the little one: whenever I was low, she used to shut her face up somehow, and seem as though she didn't hear. Very likely she didn't know she did it, but it was as good as a lesson to me."

"She is a sensitive little thing."

The Welsh lessons had ceased for some time; Huldah affirming that she had taught all she knew, and that her time was now fully occupied with compiling for the publishers; but still Ted and Luigia had kept up their friendship, and all shared the doctor's pleasure in his treasure-trove of genius.

It was an innocent, unselfish joy, but down into the midst of it came the shadow of a great sorrow. Lady Marion Griffiths was mortally ill ; a sick fancy seized her that she must gather into her house the little party which had so brightened it the previous year,—not only her sister and Sir William, but the doctor, Huldah, and the children. It is part of the essential goodness of human nature that the dying are autocrats, and her wish was obeyed.

When the children were taken into her room, she said to her sister, "I want to give Luigia my diamonds."

With the undemonstrative acquiescence that belongs to a sick-room, Lady Louisa opened the jewel case, but Huldah could not refrain from a protest. Lady Marion silenced her with a curiously decisive "I must ;—we see far, though we see dimly, when the soul is gliding out of the body, and I foresee that the child will belong to us some day. Come here, my dear," she added to Luigia. "Listen ; I give you these because I love you, and I am dying."

"Oh ! don't die," cried Luigia, with a burst of passionate weeping. "Mamma died, and it is dreadful to die ; it is all so dark and so empty."

"I am not afraid ; see how the pretty stones shine."

"I don't want them. I shall hate them. I did not love you so much till this minute, and now you never will know."

"Hush, Sweetheart ; you must be very still," said Huldah.

"Be still, when my heart is breaking?" questioned the child, with the mature air that always came to her with grief ; perhaps because she was older in sorrow than in joy.

Cecil had stood gravely thinking. He said now, "Aunt Marion, could you send me a message out of heaven?"

"What about?"

"I want to know if there are any flowers there; the Bible says precious stones, and fruits, and music, and everything but flowers—could you send me word?"

"I am afraid not."

"Well, it does not much matter; I shall come and see."

"How strange for tender-hearted Cecil to be so callous!" said Huldah afterwards to the doctor, who answered, "He is not strong enough to suffer extreme sorrows; and so he instinctively turns away from them."

Two days after, Lady Marion died. Her husband was like one paralysed,—literally dumb; perhaps feeling that Sir William and Lady Louisa would do all that was necessary. She died in the early morning, but it was night before the strange, sad turmoil of death was over, and the sorrowful little party separated. Huldah was the last, and it was just the dreary hour before daybreak as she went along the corridor leading to her room, and paused at her favourite resting-place, a deep window-sill, whence, generally, could be seen a magnificent view; now, however, the moon had set, and the light of the sea and the stars revealed only the dim, oppressively grand outline of the mountains. She was tired out, and the slow half-unconscious tears of utter weariness were falling on her cheeks.

"You should be resting," said the doctor, coming suddenly behind her, with the quiet tread of the time and circumstance. Huldah drew back into the shade, hoping that he would pass on, but he came and stood by her, looking out thoughtfully.

To break the significant silence, she said, "Our poor host!"

"Yes, one would think he could not live through it,

but he will. It is strange that grief does not kill; it reduces life to the lowest ebb, but there it stops, unless some purely physical agent steps in."

"Do you think sorrow never kills?"

"I have tried it—the sorrow of unsatisfied longing, deepening into despair—for more than a year. Do I look like dying?"

She dared not raise her tear-filled eyes higher than his lips, but these had curved into those indefinable lines of weary sadness which make the heart of the gazer ache with loving; in the pang her tears dried, so that she could look up into the dark gray depths of his eyes.

"Huldah, the very droop of your eyelashes says, 'I am sorry for you, Alick.' Will you not let your lips say so too?"

Like a docile child, she repeated, "I am sorry."

There was a subtle aroma of sweetness in having the shadow of a control over her, and he continued, "Say, 'I do not fear poverty, Alick.'"

Again she dropped his name, but obeyed him in the rest.

"Only one thing more,"—the rising of a passion, mighty in its pent-up force, vibrated in his voice,—"only one thing more, Huldah. Say, 'I will be your wife, Alick.'"

She gave a little cry, "I cannot;" but he had drawn her to his breast, and she rested there.

"It would not be fair to make my darling pronounce her sentence twice, but she will say it soon, will she not?"

A delicate pencilling of playfulness subdued the burning love of his tones into a tenderness exquisitely soothing.

Huldah drew down his head till his lips met hers,—and so they watched for the morning.



CHAPTER VII.

BRUSSELS.

QUIETLY, and indissolubly, the two lives melted into one, and when they had been wedded three years it seemed but as one day ; though the doctor chose to say, with a doleful countenance, "I am afraid,—I am sadly afraid that my wife rules me."

"I? Oh, Dr. Alick Murray!" said Huldah ; "why, I was the meekest of women three years ago, and now—"

"Now, if you ever had any meekness, it has all evaporated under the rule of King Log."

"Good King Log! Is it not the perfection of government that the people should appear to govern themselves?"

"Well, Queen Huldah, what is your petition?"

"It is rather Ted's, after all,—he wants to go to Brussels."

"To the moon!"

"No, there is no Musée there, but Monsieur Delaureau, Signor Gondio's friend, is connected with the one in Brussels, and offers to help Ted as to the lectures and general *entrée*, besides taking a little fatherly care of him."

"Why can't he stay where he is? I think he might have exhibited last year."

"His master said his painting was wonderful for a lad of eighteen, but that very thing might injure his reputation in the future; he would get the name of a prodigy, and an old prodigy is—"

"Well, rather pitiable, certainly; but is there not something driving him away from London? Boys are so reserved with men; he might tell you."

"I think he is haunted by the fear of his aunt coming upon him some day among his fellow-students; he says she is such a loud-talking body; in fact, he is ashamed of her, and yet ashamed of his shame."

"Poor Ted! Well, for a respectable woman, she is wonderfully objectionable."

"What is she? You speak of her with just the air of nausea that Ted does."

"She is that happily rare thing, a coarse-minded woman; coarse and hard, with a touch of the satanic as to temper."

"Yet, you call her respectable?"

"Well, as the phrase runs; there are many respectable people I should not like to have to respect. She is not needy; since her husband died she has lived 'upon her means' as superior landlady of two public-houses, which he bought, I believe. She never troubles Ted here?"

"No; it seems that she has had a wholesome dread of you ever since you threatened to have her taken up on a charge of manslaughter, if Ted died of that attack of typhus fever."

"Ah, one of my crazy speeches that I am always finding unexpectedly bedded in people's memories."

"Like a pebble in mud."

"Very rubbishy pebbles. Does he think she would lose sight of him in a year's absence?"

"Yes, as we may have moved by the time he comes back."

"Moved? Where to?"

"Why, to a better house; we can afford it, now that you are gaining such a standing, you dear, old, clever doctor."

"Thy wife 'will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.'"

"You would not make a bad cynic, if your eyes were not always contradicting your lips."

"Ah, a man's foes shall be those of his own—face. But I daresay we can manage the house and Ted's expenses also."

"I could go back for a little while to my old copying."

"You?—Copy Griselda."

The matter was arranged. Ted sailed for Antwerp, and stayed there a month, getting broken-hearted in the little picture gallery of Rubens, where he went so continually, and sighed so deeply, that the fair-faced frau in charge of the room grew quite uneasy about the gloomy Briton, and, for the first time since she was six years old, got puzzled over her stocking-knitting.

From the cabinet he would go to the churches, all so pervaded with the presence of the mighty in art, that poor Ted came near giving up his vocation in disgust at his feebleness.

One morning, however, he strayed up into the grand, lofty tower of the cathedral, where the wind, booming as though the noise of all the battles fought below had been caught up there and kept, seemed to roar courage into him. On coming down he stayed, and, for the first time,

studied the wonderful well-cover at the cathedral door. The beauty of the wreathing vine-leaves wrought in the stern iron seemed to bring out vividly the story of the blacksmith artist, who seems like the tutelary saint of Antwerp, and Ted, squaring his shoulders, said, "His does not seem such an unattainable height; I will aim at your life, O Quentin Matsys—without the artist's daughter though," he continued, with the last dregs of bitterness lingering on his lips.

Soon after he went on to Brussels, where, as he said, his letters ceased to be "all guide-book." The first began :—

"Did you know, dear sir, that I was a fascinating youth? I did not till now, but there is a Frenchman here who finds me so to such an extent that I find him a nuisance. He thinks me outrageously clever, which I maintain to be an offensive opinion, implying that one is a kind of monstrosity. All the pleasant people that I know consider me rather decidedly a goose; the little one never gets more flattering than 'You funny old Ted!' and her aunt long ago gained my young affections by dubbing me 'Unicorn.' I would not part with that tuft of hair from my forehead for all the hairdressers in Christendom."

"By the way, my 'old man of the sea' is either a hairdresser or a dancing master. He says he has long followed the art of cultivating the graceful. I wish he would not experiment on me. Of course, this is an execrably ungrateful way of viewing the benevolent attentions of a senior, but fancy this Frenchman proposing to accompany me to Waterloo, and going too! where he talked in such an unnatural style that our guide, an

ex-serjeant, or something, of a Belgian brigade, burst out with, 'I ask pardon of monsieur, but he must not speak so, standing on the very spot where the *Garde d'honneur* stood—and fell. The English fought well, and we—we were struggling for our life, but the enemy were brave, and an old soldier may admit now that they were almost successful.'

"I was afraid of a row, so came in with the *entente cordiale*, and our generous allies in the Crimea; but the guide seemed rather ashamed of his eloquence, and the other merely shrugged his shoulders, and muttered '*A merveille!*' exactly as though the gallant old fellow was a second-rate actor. It was a queer scene altogether; the Belgian attacking the Frenchman for maligning the French, and the Englishman glad to keep quiet about his national dignity. I think dignity is to John Bull what *la gloire* is to France,—the attribute we aim at.

"This Frenchman's name is Rameau, the same as the little one's; but I suppose it is not an uncommon one. Our rooms join at the hotel, so I am looking forward to getting rid of him as soon as Monsieur Delaureau discovers an apartment for me. But I have limited him as to price, and he has limited himself as to respectability, so the search is somewhat complicated. He—Monsieur Delaureau—is a pleasant, cultivated gentleman, and Madame, his wife, a charming old lady, once you admit that her husband is the greatest *savant* in Belgium, and, therefore, in the world; she is absolutely fierce in her assertion of this, but is otherwise the meekest little woman imaginable.

"Tell the little one that her notions of this Musée must not be founded on the British Museum: that has no paintings, save those she used to hate so, filling up

the spaces at the top of the cases ; while this is all pictures. There certainly is a Musée d'Arts, and one of Natural History, under the same roof ; but the former seems to be a mausoleum for defunct inventions, and the other is the dreariest little place possible, smelling horribly of camphor, and presided over by an intoxicated-looking giraffe, with a very visible stitch in his side, where his skin has been sewn up.

"There, I must not say any more,—only believe me, dear sir, yours, not ungratefully, "TED."

The doctor laughed a little at Ted's fancy that they considered him a goose, but grew grave at the mention of Rameau, and decided to tell Ted to be careful of him, not only as an acquaintance, but as to letting him gain any knowledge of Luigia, in case he should prove to be her father, adding, "She seems a more precious little body than ever now, for Signor Gondio has discovered, to his great delight, that she bids fair to have a wonderful voice. She could not have a better master than him ; he would have been a great man ere now, if he had not been so unskilfully honest in his aversions."

Ted triumphed in the news of "the little one's" voice ; he had always maintained that there was art in her somewhere, though it did not ooze out through her fingers, as with him. The caution concerning Rameau came just as their neighbourhood ceased, Ted having procured rooms in a steep little street leading out of the Montagne de la Cour ; on the strength of which pleasant fact, and as a tacit apology for not communicating his new address, he looked comparatively gracious when Rameau came upon him in the Parc, where he was lazily

putting words to the tune of the fountains and the curiously rural music of the shy wood-pigeons.

"Look there," said Ted, pointing to the blanched leaves of some young horse-chestnut trees.

"Perished in June! that is strange," said Rameau.

"Not withered, but blanched, ivory white; that was the lightning this morning,—they were all right yesterday."

"Where were you in the storm?"

"In the Musée, studying a picture by Jacob Ruysdael; such a calm, satisfying little bit of near landscape, it made me forget the storm. That was at work though. How an instant may destroy or perfect a thing; those leaves now will never be green again, but they have escaped fading, the decaying element is burnt out of them. I once kept some lightning-bleached leaves for years."

"See," said Rameau, "the king is coming."

"Well, *Vive le Roi!* but I don't care much about seeing him. I have two pictures of him already: one imaginary and poetical, as the young widower of our poor Princess Charlotte; the other decidedly unpoetical, as habited in the costume of the period, which gives one no idea beyond that of a general tightness. He is returning from Laeken, I suppose?"

"Yes—come—there he is."

"The people look as though they liked him; he is a nice, fatherly-looking man too; but he seems to want the copy of the Constitution in his hand—he looks well with that, done in Carrara marble,—don't you remember it? overlooking the Speaker's chair where we went the other day—the House of Representatives, was it not?"

"He is very English," said Rameau, with an honest air of deprecation.

"Yes, God bless him!"

"My wife was English—a singer."

"Indeed?"

Ted's face was interested enough now, and Rameau glided into a one-sided version of the story of his marriage, including an episode which not even the callous dulness of the narrator could rob of its tragic interest.

Rameau was Luigia's father, that soon became evident, and the incident turned on that very "Charley" of the Guards whom Ted had once heard spoken of as the suitor of Lady Mabington's sister.

Divested of Rameau's interpolations, the story, which went back some five years, ran thus:—As he, Charley, was proceeding in a leisurely manner through Europe to his consulship, the death of his elder brother made him a baronet, and, though that did not change his African plans, Sir Charles Durnston found that a little more deviousness might be introduced into his route, and the winter left him lingering at Milan, a guest of the Comtessa Bertoldi.

He was yet in the shade of a double grief, Lady Editha's death and that of his brother, for whom he had cherished a loyal, boyish love, and this perhaps made him assimilate with the sorrowful-looking Englishman, Madame Rameau, who generally assisted at the Comtessa's musical evenings.

One day he brought her a little manuscript air of Rousseau's—a curiosity, as containing only three notes. She read the title, it was one of "*Les consolations des misères de ma vie.*"

"The sorrows of life," repeated Sir Charles, musingly. "Did you know, *mia consolatrice*, that I loved a lady who died?"

"And I," said Madame Rameau, "a man who never lived."

Their eyes met, in purest sympathy, but something in the simple yet passionate song stirred deeper feelings. As though to see if she alone felt this, Madame Rameau looked up, and met a glance which made her tremble, as at the sudden unveiling of heaven. As he shut the book, he gently drew her back, till her head rested on his breast. She lay there an instant, with closed eyes, pale and smiling, but, as he bent his lips towards her forehead, she covered it with her hands, and murmuring, "Oh, my little child ! have pity !" escaped from the room.

That night Sir Charles left Milan, and resumed his African route.

In a week Madame Rameau was dead.

"Did she know what you had seen ?" asked Ted, as Rameau concluded.

"No ; I held it as a weapon, in case she should turn restive."

"And Sir Charles ?"

"Oh, I had not decided myself as to him when he set out, and I could never discover where, only that he had gone to South Africa."

Something of the tyrant and the coward in Rameau's tone made Ted rise and walk away, but Monsieur followed, saying, "Let us go for a promenade to the Allée Verte."

Ted resigned himself to all but the touch of his companion's hand upon his arm ; that he shook off, and they proceeded on their way.

As they passed the Botanic Gardens, Ted said, "I think I must turn in here ;" but the other drew him along, saying, "No, no, come to the Allée Verte."

"Well," said Ted, when they arrived, "of all the dreary places to drag a poor fellow to for a walk, this stands chief."

"Ah, but the cool water," said Rameau, with a sudden, wild look in his eyes that caused Ted to take his arm, and say to himself, "Perhaps, after all, he has a touch of insanity, and that accounts for one's feeling of repulsion with him."

The Canal de Willebroeck is dirty even for a canal, and Ted, in answer to his companion's dark, hungry glances into the water, said, "By no means fascinating to look at."

"Ah! you are yong, riche, happy, while I—" he struck his forehead fiercely, "—even now, at this moment, it is impossible for me to go where good fortune awaits me—to Paris—because of a miserable hotel bill,—mis-ér-able!" he repeated, syllablising the word, with a kind of howl.

"I am poor, not rich," said Ted, with that dryness which comes over an Englishman at anything like a melodramatic attempt to open his purse-strings.

"You think I might decamp?" said Rameau.

"You might." Ted unconsciously emphasised the "you."

"Ah, you do not know these continental hotel-keepers, the *vipères*! it would be *inutile* with them to go for a promenade leaving a box of stones in one's chamber."

"How much is the bill?"

"I have enough, all but ten francs; another ten, with some things I could sell, would carry me to Paris; as it is, I must starve, and I hate starving."

There was a grim earnestness of truth in Rameau's manner now which made Ted say "I could spare twenty francs."

"My benefactor! my liberator! I will pay you, *assurance*,—suffer me."

"Don't, there's a good fellow," said Ted starting back, in fear of an embrace; "you may as well take it at once, and let us turn homewards."

"You thought me strange just now?"

"Most decidedly."

"I was in despair. Even now I do not know—" He looked down into the water again, trying gently to disengage his arm from Ted's hand.

"Bother the man!" said Ted to himself, looking round to see if there were any people about. "Just enough onlookers to swear that I pushed him in, if he was to jump. Couldn't one distract his attention somehow? I have heard that is a good thing. The doctor ought to have given me a prescription against suicide.—Look, monsieur," he continued aloud, "at that barge lumbering along."

"Ah, let us observe it!"

As in a nightmare, Ted stood still with his companion, watching the heavy vessel, till it came so near that they could see its cargo of coarse, red bricks; then, with a low cry of fierce exultation, Rameau broke away from Ted, so suddenly as almost to overturn him, and leaped—not into the canal, but on to the boat. The bargees stared in dumb amazement, but a few words seemed to satisfy them; then, as he glided away, Rameau raised his hat and said, "*Au revoir, monsieur*. I am quite well now."

"Well," mused Ted, "if he is gone altogether, I shall have no chance to get bilious over chocolate *bon-bons*. Wonder if he did owe the hotel people a bill?"

He inquired when he returned, relating how Rameau had departed.

"Yes ; Numero 28 had been there all the winter ; he owed for three weeks' *appartement* and *table-d'hôte*. Could monsieur tell the name of the boat?"

"Unfortunately, no ; it was one with bricks, going outwards from the Quai."

"There is the small portmanteau," suggested a waiter.

"Yes, the clothes may be worth something."

But it contained only old mouldy boots.

"I am really very sorry," said Ted, who knew that the small hotel was not too profitable.

"We must bear losses ; monsieur cannot blame himself," said the host, dismissing the subject with a gentle courtesy that made Ted remember Rameau's appellation of "vipers" as one of his sins.

"Perhaps, after all, he may come back," suggested one of the servants, but his master shook his head, and proved to be right. Rameau never returned.

When Ted next saw him, he had gone, a deeper debtor, before a Mighty Judge.

As a kind of penance for his folly, Ted wrote a full account of the affair to the doctor, adding, "There is one comfort, he has learnt nothing of any of you from me. As I am in the confessional, I may as well mention another matter in which I feel inclined to be a 'goose.'

"Monsieur Delaureau has a niece, Thérèse Van Heil, the orphan daughter of his only sister, who lives with them, and is charming. I did not know a woman could be quite so pretty. She is amiable too,—enthusiastically fond of art, and yet never weary of her uncle's scientific talk, though she sometimes smiles a little, aside, to me, when he prosed. She is rather vain, but that only sets off her style of beauty, giving it animation.

"I should be at her feet by now, I believe, but for the

curious dislike with which she seems to have inspired little Jérôme Delaureau, a loving little fellow in general.

"The other day, when he had climbed upon my knee, she began gently playing with his hair; he wriggled and fidgeted under her touch, till I said, 'What is the matter, Jérôme?'

" 'I do not like her hand,' he said, whimpering. Such a fair, little hand, I could not fancy it hurting a fly's wing.

"Well, for the sake of home and art, I will be careful; but it sounds awtully cold-blooded to say so.—Yours ever,

"TED."



CHAPTER VIII.

TED'S PICTURE.

THE year was ended, and Luigia sang,—
“Ted is coming home,
Never more to roam,
Ted shall be my bonnie beau and darling.”

“Suppose the next *Indépendance Belge* contains an announcement of the marriage of Edward Vindon and Thérèse van Heil?” suggested the doctor.

“It won’t; there are no marriages in those papers, and he has not mentioned her for ever so long.”

“Bad sign that.”

“Oh, hunky! you must be only teasing me;—you know dear old Ted would never deceive us all, and Monsieur Delaureau too. Besides, I am sure he would find her out; did you not notice, in his very first letter, what he said about little Jérôme not liking her?”

“You ought to love that young urchin.”

“If she was nice, I would be pleased for Ted to marry her.”

“Sure, eh?”

“Yes,”—and indignant tears burnt on Luigia’s cheeks,
—“but I don’t believe she has any sense; only she talks

pretty, broken English, and he translates her speeches into something wonderful."

"That is rather a shrewd remark for you, young lady; how old will you be to-morrow?"

"Thirteen. It is such an awkward age; I wish one did not grow up."

"Well, I dare say you will be able to support the weight of your years for some time to come."

Here the doctor was called away, but Luigia continued to herself, "It is horrid to be old though; it was so nice when I was little Sweetheart, and everybody petted me. Nobody pets big girls until they are quite grown up, and then they have to be pretty. I wonder what I look like, really."

She laid herself down on the carpet, leaning on her elbows, in front of the looking-glass door of a chiffonier, and, after a critical survey, pronounced, "I am ugly, there is no doubt of that; pretty people are not drab-coloured. Then my nose is too long, and Signor Gondio says my mouth is too small; my eyes are queer too, Cecil Mabington says they are just the same purple gray as the plum-bloom haze upon the mountains; but I don't believe that is a proper colour for eyes to be. And my hair is no colour; it curls certainly, it won't lie straight, but the girls at school say curls are vulgar. I wish the Queen's hair was curly. Perhaps, some day the Prince of Wales will marry a curly-haired princess. Well, I suppose I must be clever and nice, but ugly people are generally stupid or cross. I don't see why they shouldn't be either. It is miserable to grow up—"

"Why, pussy! crying on the floor, like the tiny Sweetheart I used to know?"

"I've been looking at myself, auntie. I am so ugly, and so old."

"You don't suppose you always look like that, you white goose. There, you are better-looking already, with the sparkles coming into your eyes, and the red into your lips."

"But I shall be thirteen to-morrow."

"Yes, and have a new piano ; it will be here to-night."

"Oh, auntie ! you don't really mean it?"

"I do, it is the doctor's present."

"How delicious ! I have cried so over that dear old nuisance of a thing, because it would make me sing out of tune."

"No more tears now?"

"No, indeed ; piano for company, Ted coming home, and you and the doctor to love,—what a silly thing I was !"

Ted soon dispersed the cloud as to Thérèse van Heil, saying, "Oh no, she was too amiable to be wasted on me ; I soon found that she was just as charming to a young Baron who used to come there."

"Why, it is quite grand, like a German story," said Luigia ; "you ought to have fought a duel with the Baron, and then she ought to have been in love with whichever one was killed."

"Unfortunately, we entered into a sort of treaty of mutual defence. Madame Delaureau is a relation of his, and he is fond of her, and likes to go there. I, too, liked Monsieur Delaureau. So we used to stroll into one another's rooms, and say, 'Shall you be at the Delaureaux to-night?' If one was going, both went ; if not, neither ; and Mademoiselle Thérèse is as powerless as a charmed witch unless she can secure a *tête-à-tête*. It

was comical to see her pretty air of vexation when I followed the Baron, or he me ; but I am afraid she has caught him after all."

"I don't like her, Ted ; don't let's talk about her."

"Don't let's,—you little one ! I was afraid you would have grown into a young lady, like those prim *demoiselles* I used to meet sometimes coming from their *pensions*."

"I would rather be a child always ; but show me your sketches."

"You don't care for them?"

"I do, you teasing Ted.—Oh, how pretty ! what is that?"

"Moss on an old wall."

"But I never saw any moss like that, it is beautiful."

"Perhaps you never looked, but it struck me as something uncommon."

"You like uncommon things, don't you?"

"Yes, or, as my old master said, I hunt originality into mere queerness."

"What a disagreeable old thing !"

"Me?"

"No, you nice dear Ted ; the naughtier you are the better I like you."

"A useful hint that ; we may go out studying together."

"For your Academy picture?"

"No, I sketched that last spring. I have learnt some things since then as to the handling, but the subject will do."

"What shall you call it?"

"I think just what it is, 'The Last Anemone.'"

"Those little white wind-flowers, that fade just as the wild hyacinths bloom?"

"Yes, I have both in the picture."

"Oh, do let me see !

"That is it."

The painting was, as Ted had said, merely a sketch in water-colour for a larger one in oil. Near the centre was the wind-flower ; poised on its slender stalk, it stood in fair, sweet health, among the dead of its race. Near by, a cluster of brilliant wild hyacinths had just blown.

"I can almost smell them," said Luigia.

"I must tone down those blues though."

"Where did the brown oak leaves come from ?"

"They were really there—last year's ; and the contrast with that moss-green ground was so tempting."

"I like it all too well, Ted."

"Why ?"

"I could cry over the wind-flower."

"Poor little thing ! it is rather sad for it to die of the sunshine. This one was in a shady place, or it would not have lived so long."

"People will like it very much."

"I don't know ; it wants human interest. I can quite understand why Turner would put figures in to spoil his pictures ; but I dare not, my women always look like bolsters stuck up on end."

"But if one really was in a dear little nook of a wood like that, one would not want anybody."

"Not if one was writing poetry, perhaps."

"Like Cecil Mabington.—Oh, I forgot, I promised not to tell."

"Well, you have not told much, and you need not tell any more. I shall send you away now ; for the next few months I must be 'a working man.'"

Ted did work, until the rough suggestion grew into a

harmonious presentment of as lovely a piece of wood-scenery as could well be imagined, and he escaped a great error of his school, though he painted in detail—he looked at his picture as a whole, so that the eye was attracted, not by what had cost him most pains, but by what was lawfully and naturally most conspicuous.

“It is done now, and sent in,” he said suddenly one morning.

“Oh, Ted! we wanted to see it first,” said Luigia, reproachfully.

“I could not help it—I had grown morbid over it.”

“Morbid, old fellow? try some steel,” said the doctor.

But steel could not restore Ted's old elasticity; for the first time in his life, his energy was exhausted. The doctor blamed Thérèse van Heil; Huldah thought he had worked too hard; but probably Luigia was nearest the truth when she said, “I believe he is living over again the time when he first began to paint, and nobody knew.”

She alone went with him on the first exhibition day; he begged to have no one else.

“What a good light it is in, Ted!” she exclaimed, joyfully.

“Yes, I did not expect such a favourable hanging.”

They drew near just as an inane young lady, trying to fascinate an inaner young gentleman, had begun to discuss the subject.

“The Last Anemone,” said she; “how droll! I thought they were a kind of fish.”

“Fish? Well, really,” said the gentleman, “I have seen some at the sea-side,—jelly they looked like.”

The lady gave an ecstatic little giggle, then twittered, “Oh, you are too severe!—do be merciful to the poor artists.”

"They are such a conceited set."

"Let us come away, Ted," whispered Luigia; but he held her fast, and waited, while a muddy stream of small talk was poured over his work; then he said quietly,

"And these are the people we paint for."

"Wait till the notices come out, Ted."

"A good, savage cutting-up would do me more good than anything, I believe."

"Savage," in the sense of barbaric, was precisely the term best suited to the first criticism, with its mingling of ignorance and cruelty; but it did not rouse Ted, his sole comment was, "That must be a nice man to know."

Very different was the next. After discussing some more important works, the writer said, "In 'The Last Anemone' we have emphatically a healthy painting,—a little child might be 'so sorry for the wind-flower,' and Solomon himself, wearied with the knowledge that included 'the hyssop on the wall,' might pause for refreshment before this picture, so unaffected, yet so powerful; its only important fault is a tendency to exaggeration."

"That is just," said Ted. "I did exaggerate; I was afraid people would not see what I wanted them to see."

"The critic goes on to suggest that very thing," said Huldah, who was reading the paper:—"Probably this arises from a dread of not being understood; a natural mistrust in a young artist; but this one need not fear, he has powers of expression which will make him intelligible, let him see only to the truth of his conception."

Then, with a careful, steady hand, in a few words the master critic pointed out sundry faults and excellences of technical treatment, and ended with one of those flashes of generous encouragement which only a master dare indulge in.

"God bless him ! he has saved me," said Ted.

The picture sold within a few days of its exhibition, and Ted's was pronounced "just the pleasant, happy style that one wants for a room."

Commissions began to flow in, but the oddest, and therefore, according to the doctor, the most acceptable to Ted, was one which came through Sir William Mabington. He and Sir Charles Durnston had kept up an intermittent correspondence, and the latter, having heard through him of Ted, now wrote to offer the appointment of artist-attaché to an exploration party which the Government was about to send to the interior. He added, "We would pay well for the sketches and the paintings for the Government House, and he would have a fine opportunity for making money in ivory."

"It makes one feel old to hear Charley Durnston talking in that business-like style," said Sir William; "but the hint about elephants' tusks is not to be despised."

Ted declared that if the elephants were all ivory, they would be safe as far as he was concerned, but that he should like to go.

"Of course," said the doctor; "just as people are beginning to talk about you, march off out of the way."

"But why should not some one do for African plants what Audubon did for American birds? It would make twice the man of me, and, after all, three years is not much out of one's life."

"Well, perhaps not, at twenty-one, and you want a thorough change, old fellow; you shall go if the little one will let you."

The doctor was fond of asserting, and certainly did his best to prove, that a child in a household is sure to rule, just because none fear its power; so Luigia was called

into the council, and she at once voted for the African scheme ; declaring, bravely, that three years was nothing, and that she would exhibit Ted's pictures, and be elected Academician, while he was away.

But as the time of parting drew near "the little one's" courage departed ; nothing but an old dread of being silly and selfish kept her from an imploring "Don't go, Ted." Restlessly she followed him about, resisting all attempts at a conversation, till the last night, when he took her into his painting room, to give her a half-whimsical charge over its contents, ending with "We will say good-bye here, where we have been so happy ; remember, you are Ted's little Princess, and he goes to get a crown for you." Lightly he kissed her hair, and she said, "You never gave me that before, Ted."

"What ?"

"A kiss."

"Will you not give me one in return ?"

"No, I will keep it till you come back."

"Suppose I never come back."

So she kissed him.

With Ted's departure, a heavy blank fell upon the doctor's household. Though all protested against the notion of a friend's distance intensifying his absence, South Africa would seem farther off than Brussels, and the year since that visit had knit the little family more closely together. They heard of him from the Cape, and again from some distance up the country : then came silence for months.

About this time the doctor, who had been a good deal annoyed by his chemist, joined some other physicians in the foundation of a company for the supply of pure drugs.

"I don't like it," said Sir William Mabington, when his opinion was asked.

"I shall get nine per cent. for my money," said the doctor.

"My dear doctor, if you liked to give me a hundred pounds, I could pay you twenty per cent. for a couple of years, and gain sixty pounds by the transaction."

"But have you never realised a large interest?"

"Yes, often, but then it was by sheer, hard work, not by passing resolutions."

"They have made me chairman."

"Very shrewd of them."

"There are many better names amongst the directors."

"Their owners have about as much to do with the affair as the Pacha has with the last Egyptian scheme."

"There is Mudberry, he is very active in it."

"And what does he know about drugs?"

"You are as bad as Signor Gondio; he keeps on piping, 'If it was but an opera company.'"

"Ah, he has an unsaleable opera, has he not?"

"Yes, he has taught Luigia some of the airs; they are very sweet. He is clever, undoubtedly."

"He should try it on the Continent. His friend, Monsieur Delaureau, is coming to spend a week or two with us soon; you must bring the Signóre to dine with him some day."

"I did not know you were acquainted with Delaureau."

"Nor I, till he wrote and told me so; but it seems that we struck up a friendship on the Prizes Committee of the Great Exhibition, and he wants to consult me as to one or two things, so I have asked him to come over here, and bring Madame Delaureau, to make my wife's acquaintance. They have just lost their only child; the

poor little fellow swallowed a plum stone, and the foolish girl, his cousin, who alone was with him, never called for help till it was too late."

"Mademoiselle van Heil, was that?"

"I suppose so,—Thérèse, he calls her."

The Delaureaux came, and the savant and the man of plans agreed heartily, as did their respective wives; but there the *entente cordiale* broke down. By the expenditure of considerable scheming, Thérèse van Heil had contrived to make one of the party, and, as Cecil said, she nearly drove him wild. She began by treating him as a marriageable youth; then, finding that, in those matters, he was not precocious, she suddenly turned round, talked down to him, and patronised both him and his great friend, Luigia, wasting an unnecessary amount of provocation upon them, since the mere fact of her presence seemed to be exasperation enough.

But for her position as guest, and dependant of a guest, Cecil would have utterly routed her in his pet's defence; but the lad of seventeen was still the "little gentleman" his mother had described at ten years old, and Thérèse was keen enough to see this, and unscrupulous enough to profit by it.

"I wish Ted was at home," sighed Luigia, one morning.

"Why?" said Cecil.

"He could ask her after the Baron that she was going to marry; she talks enough about herself, I wonder she never mentions him."

"Well, we cannot."

"I would not mind, just to see what she would say."

"No, don't, Sweetheart."

"Well, I won't, if I can help it."

But, one day, Luigia, quite unexpectedly to herself,

found that she could not help using the only weapon she knew of ; so, with a child's clumsy triumph, she burst out with " How is your husband, mademoiselle ? "

She expected to produce an impression, but not quite such a one as followed. Thérèse went suddenly white with rage, or fear, and whispered fiercely,

" What do you mean ? "

" Your husband ? " said Luigia, repeating her mistake, since it proved so effective.

Thérèse, losing all control of herself, now seized her young antagonist and shook her so violently that Cecil exclaimed, " Mademoiselle ! " and sprang to the rescue. Still, with stiff lips and chattering teeth, she repeated, " What do you mean ? "

" The Baron ! " said Luigia, defiantly, expecting another shake ; but the grasping hands released her shoulders, the blue lips grew red again, and Thérèse subsided into a chair, saying tranquilly, "*Si bête* !—I mean, you very foolish child."

Perhaps she felt that she had been too sudden, both in her attack and release of Luigia ; for, during the remaining week of her visit, she sedulously propitiated the children, as she called them ; but this, said Luigia to Cecil, only " looked as though Mademoiselle had some sort of a husband somewhere."



CHAPTER IX.

CECIL MABINGTON.

THREE months after, kind, hearty, genial Lady Louisa Mabington was dead—dead of a disease that had long lain in her system, but which at the last developed so rapidly that no skill or care could save her.

Perhaps never was the loss of wife and mother so peculiarly irreparable; it was not only that they mourned her, but they missed her so. She had been so much the cement of the small family, that on her departure the two left behind fell apart, inevitably. Notwithstanding the sound, healthy affection, and even admiration, which Sir William and his son cherished for each other, they had never been able to understand, and consequently to sympathise, each with the other's different nature. Sir William was vigorous, realistic, and, though without coarseness, distinguished by just that rich animation which would have made him consider Moorish architecture an improvement on Greek. In Cecil, the refinement of centuries, inherited from his mother, had culminated in an extreme simplicity. He ate brown bread and

lunched on fruit, just, as he said, because he liked it better ; frugal fare giving him exactly the same sense of enjoyable freshness as luxuries did his father.

In the same way he disliked gilt picture frames, and what most people would call handsome book-bindings, and chose for his own rooms carpets and paper-hangings which Sir William said "nobody could see."

"But I don't want them to stare people into looking at them," pleaded Cecil ; "let me furnish just these rooms my own way, may I ?"

The house was being repaired just before Lady Mabington fell ill, and consent was given ; but, as the upholsterer submitted, "what people in general didn't like would come expensive," and when the process of what Cecil called "dispensing with superfluities" was complete, Sir William, finding, as he said, that "five hundred pounds had not even put a chair in one of the three rooms," declared his intention of finishing the matter himself. Cecil said, "I did not know it was necessary for us to consider expense."

"Everybody must consider expense," said Sir William.

"Very well, sir—nothing in life is worth a row."

Accordingly, the semi-Greek, semi-monastic, but withal curiously elegant little rooms had their anachronisms brought to a climax of absurdity by the addition of French velvet lounges, for which their presumed occupier generally indemnified himself by lying on the carpet.

This year was Cecil's last at Eton, and, after his mother's death, he hurried back there, and plunged into hard reading, as though he would bury her memory under his books. But the boy had not the physical organisation which can beat down grief. Before long, his dame, after, poor little lady, wasting much unnecessary

cogitation as to whether she was taking a liberty, wrote to Sir William, begging him to fetch home his son, and not to say that she had sent for him.

When Sir William arrived, thus unexpectedly, Cecil of course pronounced himself "all right;" but he was curiously willing to accompany his father, and anxious to wish every one good-bye coolly.

In a dry, boyish way he was a good deal loved by his companions, but he did not respond to any of their proffers of visits by-and-bye, saying only, "They are such awful fellows to shout."

He persisted in asserting, even to the doctor, that he was "quite well, except for a queer pain now and then."

"Where?" said the doctor.

"I don't know,—that is the comical part of the business; but it would kill me, I fancy, if it stayed long enough for me to locate it."

"How do you feel afterwards?"

"Chiefly glad that it is gone, but it does use me up rather; it would be a comfort to have a board at my back, or to be carried about on one like a German baby."

"You want a change."

"Don't I? only a change of body is not quite so attainable as a change of clothes."

"When are you going to Clyddfan?"

"Not at all, unless you will let Luigia come too; I really could not stand it. I know what you are thinking of, my dear old friend, but this is not consumption, you know. I have no tendency that way."

"No, that is one good thing."

"Then, do let her come, with her aunt; you too. You can run up to town now and then; it is only to

fancy that I am some old hypochondriac patient. Will you ? ”

The pleading, lustrous blue eyes contradicted the boyish bravado of manner, and made the doctor yield, saying to himself, “Huldah, if any one, can fill the mother’s place.”

Luigia was nearly fifteen now, but she seemed inclined to make up for having been a somewhat precocious child, by growing into a singularly child-like girl. She came to Clyddfan in good spirits, in consequence of a long letter from Ted, containing a little painting of a scarlet cucumber, one of the *Cucurbitaceæ* Cecil said it was ; but he looked sceptical when Luigia repeated praises of its flavour. She, nothing damped, went on : “What do you think, Cecil ? Ted’s party met another, somewhere in the wild parts, a Portuguese company, whom the natives had attacked, and the commandant chose to consider that Ted saved his life, and offered him to become a Portuguese subject, and be Dom Edouard de some place.”

“You have not a very clear idea of the story,” said Cecil, who did not seem ill-pleased at this.

“Oh, it does not matter ; he would be the same dear old Ted ; besides, he says he backed out of it.”

“You must not learn to talk slang, Sweetheart. Which do you like best, Ted or me ? ”

“I like you so differently. You and I have always been good friends ever since we were lost on the mountain ; but Ted seems so much older, and cleverer too,—than me, I mean,—and he is so funny. You know, Cecil, you do not often make me laugh, only when you don’t want to.”

“You must not cultivate your wit at the expense of your friends.”

"Was I witty?—how?" asked Luigia, with much the same air of astonished compunction as if she had been accused of dishonesty; Cecil's tone was so severe for him to use to her.

"Never mind, Sweetheart; you care for me a little, do you not?"

"Why, Cecil, I love you as much as you do me."

"If you did, child, you would be a woman, and would not say so. Come, sing to me; you are older when you sing."

"Would you like 'Che faro'? The doctor says it was the first thing he ever heard me say. Mamma was so fond of it."

She rendered the passionate, honey-sweet melody with a singular force of expression, and Cecil said, "You will be a loving woman, little one; such women have to suffer for that sometimes. Remember, always, that there was one who loved you, and would fain have made you his wife, my little perfumed, poisoned arrow, whose very sweetness is helping to kill me. It is hard."

"Cecil, I think I know what I am saying: if you like, I will marry you, and try to make you well."

It seemed almost as though the force of his will had called into existence her woman's nature, as she stood before him, with folded hands and shy, drooping eyes.

For a moment, a rosy, sunset glow suffused his face, while he murmured, "I could make her happy." But it faded quickly, and, with the half-mocking tenderness in which he was wont at once to veil and to indulge his love, he said, "No, sweet, that would not be fair to the Lady Luigia that is to be. See," he continued, "I have written you words for that air you were playing the other day—whose is it? They had to be very irregular."

"I think it is mine. I can't remember hearing it anywhere. Do sing them."

So Cecil sang—

THE SONG OF THE SNOW-FLAKES.

"We come from a far-away home,
Beyond the dark clouds of earth,
There the sun shines ever,
And stormy weather
Never disturbs our mirth.

"On the wings of the wind we come,
Bearing us lightly and free,
Singing our song
As we float along,
Light as the spray of the sea.

"We are feathers from angels' wings,
On the grassy graves we play,
But the fresh-dug earth,
It destroys our mirth,
We sink, and we melt away."

"What does that last verse mean?" said Luigia.

"Have you not noticed how the snow never seems to rest on a newly-made grave? It melts into tear-drops directly, but the grass-grown ones it covers as with a merciful veil of forgetfulness."

"Do you know, Cecil, I don't believe in forgetting? I can remember all my life, even when I was so little, in Italy."

"You have never spoken of it."

"No, that is because I remember: the thought of it smarts, like a burn."

"You were unhappy?"

"Mamma died of the misery, and I saw her die; I,

alone.—What verses are those over-leaf? ‘I am coming, mother, coming.’ Oh, let me see.” She read:—

“I am coming, mother, coming,
Through weariness and pain ;
I am coming, mother, coming,
To be with you again.

“’Tis just a year ago, dear,
Since you went home to God ;
The time has seemed so slow, dear,
So rough the path I trod ;

“My feet are stumbling often,
Life’s road is hard and steep
Without your hand to soften,
Your tender care to keep.

“’Tis nearly over now, love,
I’ll not be waiting long
Till you will kiss my brow, love,
And I shall hear your song.

“The feeling that I’m coming
It flutters at my heart ;
Like autumn wild bees humming,
It whispereth ‘Depart.’

“I am coming, mother, coming
To be with you again ;
I am coming, mother, coming
Through weariness and pain.”

“They want polishing awfully,” said Cecil.

“Oh, Cecil! how can you?”

“What? write bad verses, or probe my own wounds? Why, pet, you are not crying? Go down now, and bewitch Harding into gathering you some of his pet blossoms.”

In the grounds Luigia met the doctor and said, gravely,
"I am afraid Cecil is very ill."

"Why?"

"He writes poetry."

"Bad sign certainly, for mind and body both."

"I did not mean that, but it is about dying."

"Well, I don't know as to that; many a youth has begun by invoking Death, who has lived to progress backwards into an Ode to Bacchus. I will see to him."

The doctor assumed a hard cheerfulness, but he was restlessly miserable about his old favourite, coming and going continually between Clyddfan and London, where he consulted with some brother physicians, and quarrelled with them for expressing his own opinion. With Cecil himself he seldom talked anything but philology.

The morning after Luigia's alarms he came upon his patient in the library, and said, "Against all rules; but how do the languages get on?"

"Tolerably. I have been digging into Bornean lately. Do you not think theirs is a better salutation than our 'How de do?' 'Tena koë,' 'That's you!' said with an air of delighted discovery, must be really complimentary."

"Yes, but, undramatised, it sounds rather American in its emphatic assertion of a self-evident fact.—How goes the health?"

"Better than the temper. I have absolutely been cross with Sweetheart two or three times."

"Ah! you have been so used to being good-tempered that you did not value the blessing."

"But it is horrid to grow into a morose bear."

"Never mind, my boy, I shall be happy to take a hug any day."

The doctor and Cecil were both right as to his testi-

ness ; he was naturally and by habit almost lazily sweet-tempered, but the constant irritation of pain and weakness was changing this into a condition which he described as being "like a woman, all over nerves, with the ends on the surface, ready for anybody to rub."

One day, Sir William had been discussing at some length that morning's *Times*, including a peculiarly unsavoury divorce case in "the Lords." Cecil broke in with—"What horrid things you do talk about, sir!"

"Well, my boy, perhaps my early life may have left me rather coarse-grained ; but your mother never seemed to find me so."

"And she bade me comfort you ! Forgive me, dear father, I am altogether wrong, I think."

About this time he became rapidly worse, and said to the doctor, "I think it is time Luigia went to Ty Cefn ; they have asked for her."

"Does she tire you ?"

"Oh, no ; I am selfish enough to wish to take her with me to the very gates of heaven. But she is a delicate little piece of mechanism ; I would spare her the painful knowledge of death."

"You call that selfish ?"

"Yes, it is more than half because I do not want to be a repulsive memory to her."

"You could never be that to any one ; but, my boy, mine old favourite, will you see Sir Geoffrey Hale ?"

"Any one you like ; it can make no difference, you know !" And the doctor could make no denial.

That evening, when Cecil and Luigia were alone, he said : "Do you remember, Sweetheart, when you were little you used to repeat the fourteenth chapter of St. John strangely well ? Could you do it now ?"

"I will try." And she began, softly.

The exquisite human tenderness of the words seemed to have penetrated the child's nature ; she gave them, as Cecil had said, strangely well—from the first "Let not your heart be troubled" to the "Peace I leave with you." There her voice faltered, and, breaking into bitter weeping, she cried : "Cecil, I know what you mean ; it was Christ's farewell to His friends ! My brother ! oh, my brother ! Cecil !"

With no brother's love he gathered her into his arms, and kissed the soft curls lying on his breast ; then, when he had soothed her into quietude, he said, "I am afraid, after all, you love me not too little but too much ; I had forgotten that Love is the mother of Sorrow, but I could not let you go unwarned."

"Go?—where?"

"To Evan Prys ; they want you, and it is best."

"Away from you ? Now ?"

"Only a few days sooner."

"Do you wish it ?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go."

"My darling !—my darling ! don't think I would not keep you, if only I could. Kiss me, Sweet ; just once."

She raised her head, and so, lip to lip and soul to soul, the young man and the child embraced, for the first time, and the last.

At Ty Cefn Luigia was petted as though she were a shy elf-queen that a rough breath might scare away.

The "little wife's" soft Welsh eyes followed her about, to read the innermost wish of her heart, but they could not reach it.

One day, Morgan Griffiths—the squire, as Evan called him—came to see her. Mutely she looked her inquiry, and he answered, “Not quite so well to-day, my dear.”

She broke away from his kindly, detaining hand and rushed from the house.

Suddenly quickened into unreserve, the squire said to Evan, “I would give half my possessions to own that child.”

“She is curiously like you, sir. I never saw her with you before. It struck me—”

“So my wife once said ; but she resembles you just as much ; a face so mobile may be like twenty people in the course of a day.”

Meanwhile, Luigia was swiftly leaving the mountain behind, for Clyddfan ; her one thought, throbbing like a pulse-beat, “Quicker, quicker !”

On, past the brawling stream, through the quiet park, where the startled rabbits had scarce time to get out of her path ; across the terrace garden, her dress leaving a shower of bright petals behind her ; in at the massive doorway, where, in answer to her panting question, the servant said, “Sinking fast.”

Still on, through the long corridors, seeming endless now, till she heard the doctor’s voice, and found, all too soon, as it seemed then, that she had reached Cecil’s room.

She hesitated, and stood looking through the open door.

Cecil was sitting up, a crimson wrapper thrown round him, his blue eyes shining out of his fair, pale face, like spots of heaven through a white cloud.

He had not spoken for some hours, but now he said,

eagerly, "Sweetheart, I am glad." Then she stole into the room, and knelt beside him.

With a smile of infinite content, he took her face between his two hands, and looked down into her eyes. For a while they conversed thus, mutely and eloquently ; then, a sudden impulse seizing her, she cried, "Cecil !—bless me !"

Steadily and low, he said, "God bless and keep my darling, always, for Christ's sake. Amen."

A calm, sweet awe seemed to follow the words ; Luigia still knelt, his hand upon her bowed head, till a certain hard coldness in the touch roused her. She looked up. With the blessing on his lips, Cecil Mabington had died.



CHAPTER X.

MRS. TUEZEK.

THE wifeless and childless, Sir William fell under the dominion of his housekeeper, Mrs. Tuezek ; who, according to her own assertion, became more of a friend than a servant. The domestics below-stairs declared "Tuezek" to be an unpronounceable name, and substituted "Old 'Ippergrit" for it. But the hypocrisy was assuredly not religious : the lady thus maligned certainly went to church when she could think of no plausible reason for staying away ; but she was wont to affirm boldly that she hated "bobbing up and down all prayer time," and "liked the sermon best, because then one could sit still and rest one's eyes" (*Anglicé*, nod).

Mrs. Tuezek always wore black silk and white linen, and solemnity and spotlessness surrounded her like a robe. "Poor, honoured Tuezek had been in the army" —valet to an officer, said his detractors, adding that his relict was bald in spots, in consequence of a habit he had of abstracting tufts of her hair without scissors, during his moments of annoyance ; also, that he had once

broken the bridge of her nose with his fist, on the plea the "it sneered at him."

These facts considered, it was magnanimously forgiving of his victim to allude to him so frequently as her "idle of a man"—meaning, probably, either ideal or idol. But that Mrs. Tuezek was not a keen analyst of character may be predicated from the circumstance that she generally spoke of Sir William as "Poor dear," and as being dependent upon her for society; whereas, beyond a vague, general notion that "Tuezek rolled her eyes about a good deal," he had not the most rudimentary ideas of her personality.

It was just noon, and the autumn sunshine streamed pleasantly in, through the blind of the housekeeper's room, on to a little table covered with a green cloth, whereon stood a work-box that yawned open in plethoric respectability.

On the wall hung a ghostly glass photograph, supposed to represent the deceased Mr. Tuezek; and beneath it sat his relict, who had just refreshed herself, rather liberally, with sponge cake and jelly; apropos to which she was murmuring, "Hope it won't spoil my dinner; nothing ever does come quite right in this world." But Mrs. Tuezek was not much given to prophetic griefs, so, sinking deeply into her cushioned chair, she began stitching at one of the never-failing linen cuffs, looking as complete a picture of comfort as a cat on a hearth-rug; the resemblance was only completed by her start of displeasure when a dog's gray nose appeared in the doorway.

"Get out, you beast!" said Mrs. Tuezek, with the energy she indulged in when favoured by solitude. Doggie, however, stood his ground, which was presently

explained by the appearance of his master, and hers, Sir William.

"Oh, sir, I was quite shook out of myself, as it were : I thought dear little Faust was a strange dog. You did not ring, I hope, sir ?"

"No, my bell is broken."

"It shall be seen to at once, sir."

"I want you to have my portmanteau packed by three o'clock, I am going to Clyddfan. Mr. Morgan Griffiths will return with me, on a visit here, next week."

"Certainly, sir ; shall I keep little Faust down here ?"

But Doggie decided that question by following his master, casting suspicious glances as he went out towards a corner where reposed a slender but most penetrating cane.

"Bother the yelp !" muttered Mrs. Tuezek ; "I am always forgetting it was Mr. Cecil's. 'Vowst' indeed ! Toby's the proper name for a dog, or else Fan."

She presently rang her bell, and desired one of the maids to come and help her to pack the portmanteau, adding, "I don't feel equal to much fatigue."

"Don't you ?"

The tone was certainly not sympathetic, and Mrs. Tuezek fired immediately, saying, "Do you know who you are talking to, Susan ?"

"Yes."

"Who ?"

"You."

"Me, indeed ! Never a 'ma'am' from week's end to week's end ; do you know who I am ?"

"Mrs. Tuezek."

The girl's stolidity, whether assumed or real, was provoking, and drove the housekeeper to the one weapon on which she always relied, though it as invariably failed her.

"You leave this day month, Susan."

"To-morrow would suit me better."

"Then, not a penny of wages shall you get."

"I'll trust to master for that."

"Speak to him, and your character's gone. I'll never give you one, and it'll sound very pretty to say, 'Missus won't, but master will.'"

There was enough of the force of truth in this speech to silence Susan, and by three o'clock Mrs. Tuezek had composed herself into the air of languid humility which she kept for her master.

"I've taken the liberty, sir,—leastways, I hope so,—I mean, I don't hope, only—" Mrs. Tuezek always lost her way in benign speeches; she stopped in despair; then brought out: "Sponge cake for the journey, in wrapper-pocket," as though she was reading a telegram.

"Very well. Thank you," answered Sir William, who thought her rather puzzle-headed, but, perhaps, all the better woman for that.

After he had once trodden and twice sat upon the cake, he determined to leave it in the cab, and did so; but things wittingly lost have a curious knack of returning to their owners. He was just seated in the railway carriage, when the cabman came to the door, saying, "Left this behind, sir."

"I do not want it."

"Very well, sir—something for myself?" and he touched his hat, with the air of one who is in the act of making up his mind as to the social status of the person addressed.

"What for?" said Sir William, good-naturedly.

"Leavin' my cab, sir I'd no right to do it, and as

like as not my 'orse 'll be on his way to Paddin'ton by the time I get back; he's fond o' takin' a stroll by hisself—rather given to improvin' his mind, he is."

Sir William gave the man a shilling, and in so doing dropped a sovereign between the platform and the carriage; the cabman stooped to pick it up, and just at this instant, the train starting, the projecting step caught his bent head, and he fell forward on to the rails. A scream of horror arose from those who had seen the accident; the train was stopped, and twenty trembling hands were stretched forth to raise what might be an insensible form; but, as a delighted porter exclaimed, "cabby's rough head popped up like a Jack-in-the-box," and he said, cheerily, "All right, mateys. I lay close and hugged the ground; ain't hurt a bit, on'y smashed my hat,—got the sovereign, too."

"Keep it, my man, and thank God for your life," said Sir William, quietly.

"Ay, that I will, sir; we ain't half such heathens as gentlefolks thinks us; but won't my old 'oman and me have a feed? You shall choose our supper, my lord, as you've stood treat."

"I am no lord; duck and green peas, if you like."

"That's the very thing; my little old 'oman is blind, she is, but won't she enjoy herself, just?"

"Where do you suppose your horse is by now?"

"Lor' bless ye, sir! that was only gammon; one must gammon a bit to live; he's only too glad to stand still, poor old chap; he stands on the rank sometimes, a noddin' into his nose-bag, till I 'most expects to hear him a-talkin' in his sleep."

Here the train moved off, and the cabman had to turn to an admiring audience of porters, to whom he confided

that he would "rather like to bargain for a railway accident every day of his mortal life."

Meanwhile, Mrs. Tuezek was improvising a conversation between Sir William and herself, for the benefit of a neighbouring housekeeper, who had "dropped in to tea."

"Says he, 'Tuezek, I feel your value, believe me;' and says I, 'Sir, your faithful servant I am, and ever shall be, Amen.'"

Here, with some dim idea of being in church, both ladies nodded soporifically.

"What did he say next?" inquired Mrs. Miggles.

"Well, I can't say he spoke,—but he looked; you know how men do. I haven't had such a look—ah, dear me! not since poor honoured Tuezek and me was in Greenwich Park one Whitsun Sunday."

"Never mind Tuezek," exclaimed Mrs. Miggles, with an acidity inexcusable considering the quantity of apricot jelly she was consuming.

"Ah! but I do mind him. Mrs. Miggles, mark my word: if ever I marry my dear second, it will be for love of my dear first."

"Why, how ridiculous you do talk! How can you marry a second, when you've had another husband since Tuezek? Just as if I didn't know that, though you have dropped him so unaccountable; t'aint fair, now's he dead too."

"He don't count; a coarse-minded publican."

"He left you them two houses though."

"The leases fell out last year. I owe him nothing; he never did appreciate my disposition."

"How queer them words sound!" said Mrs. Miggles, who was evidently addicted to an uncompromising British female style of comment.

"Ah, you see, I have mixed a great deal in good society of late years, and there's a kind of air rubs off on one, somehow."

"A hair rub off, what next?" and Mrs. Miggles, trying to combine the processes of laughter and provisioning, nearly choked herself.

"Well, you'd hardly believe it, Mrs. Miggles; but when him as shall be nameless left me a widow three year ago, I was as rough as—well, say yourself, now."

Mrs. Tuezek had no sarcastic intention, and her companion was not afflicted with a sensitive dignity, so the simile was only received by "Well, rough or smooth, I must be going."

"Not till you've had a bit of supper," said Mrs. Tuezek; "I've ordered it at nine o'clock,—a nice, juicy beefsteak and onions; that suits my weak chest, I find, better than anything."

"So it does mine, but I ought to be home by then."

"Well, I'll ring, and tell cook eight o'clock."

Mrs. Tuezek rang, and rang again, till she had quite rubbed off the air that had coated her from good society, and stood revealed, an energetic shrew; but no other result followed.

"They're most uncommon quiet too," said she; "I'll just pop in, and see what they're all up to."

Stealthily both ladies slipped out of the room, but they found their precautions unnecessary: the kitchen was empty and—alas for the steak!—fireless; and, but for a tiny jet of gas, all dark. Under the burner, on the table, lay a letter addressed "Mrs. Tuezek." Dim visions of an amorous butler floated through her mind, and she hurriedly turned the gas, not up, as she intended, but

out. She gave a faint scream thereat, exclaiming, "The air seems full of ghosts."

"Black-beetles, more like," said Mrs. Miggles; "I feel as if one was crawlin' up my boot now."

There is certainly a vigour in realistic theories; Mrs. Tuezek instantly succumbed, and had "a creepy feel" also. Presently she got a light, and opened the letter, reading aloud:—

"DEAR MA'AM,—Hopeing as this will find you well, me and Susan is thinking of changing our state; leastways, we was married on Monday; and, not for to ill-convenience master, we leaves to-night; likewise Cook and Mr. Philips, which have been a loving couple some time, only kept it quiet; all the rest thought it would be dull, so they come too; all but Smut, which she have no where to go to, but we've told her if you flees at her, to come to the arey gate and squeal 'Police.' We'll come for our wages when master comes back, and we took a inventory of what things we leaves."

Here the letter ended abruptly, with sundry blots and an indistinct outline of a cat's head; whether with any disrespectful purpose, or because the agonies of composition had suddenly seized upon the writer in that form, did not appear.

"Who's it from?" said Mrs. Miggles.

"Why, Charles, our footman; I know his writing; but Mr. Philips I did think would have looked higher. Drat us, and save us!" continued the housekeeper, dismissing all sentimental regrets, "what ever shall I do? a inwentry too! as if I'd touch their rubbish!"

"Well," said Mrs. Miggles, disappointed of her supper,

"this is a thing I've never had happen to me, in all the years I've been a housekeeper."

"Oh, no—we're all very clever, till we're out of the wood."

"I'll wish you good-night."

"Good-night, indeed!—Smut, where are you?"

Smut,—so named on account of some internal blackness in her constitution which seemed to ooze out, and cover her, notwithstanding constant scrubbing,—Smut was waiting in a back kitchen, in trembling indecision as to whether she should run away and drown herself, or attack the housekeeper with the poker. Mrs. Tuezek, however, understood the importance of conciliating the only "help" left to her, and behaved accordingly; but as her acquired incapacity was not part of her general affectation, she found it a real trial to be dependent on a damsel of such undeveloped capacities as Smut; who was equal to any amount of work that could be done with black lead, but, as she said, "could not cook, nor wish, a better dinner than herrings and onions."

She was troubled, too, with what Mrs. Tuezek, in a phrase she had picked up somewhere, called "ill-regulated sympathies," in a fit of which she had taken in and sheltered a half-wild cat, that, in its terror of the housekeeper, was continually plunging under her feet.

"What on earth could you want with that cat?" said the exasperated woman, after stumbling for the twentieth time over the luckless animal.

"Lor' bless ye, mum! it come a meowlin' and a howlin' down the arey, starved; and I just thought, supposin' it was you or me, we wouldn't like not to have no notice took."

"Me meowling down an area, indeed!" said Mrs. Tuezek, growing dignified.

"We never knows what we may come to, mum; there was my aunt Hemmer, a lady's maid she woz, and as stuck up as you'd wish to see, and she come to the work'us, she did, and that's worse than any arey, so I've heard tell."

Mrs. Tuezek was certainly a clever housekeeper: by Sir William's return she had so far filled up the domestic gaps, that he was only conscious of one or two fresh faces; but the Hegira below stairs, like many small events, had consequences more important than itself.

Apropos to a scared-looking new housemaid, whom they came upon in the dining-room, Sir William remarked to his brother-in-law, "Mrs. Tuezek has but one fault—she seems to be the centre of a kind of centrifugal force."

"Centripetal, she means it to be, as far as you are concerned," was the reply, accompanied by such a significant look as provoked the inquiry, "What do you mean?"

"She means to come Mrs. Bardell over you, as sure as my name is—Winkle."

"But it isn't," said Sir William, with a simplicity growing out of his bewilderment.

"No, nor yours Pickwick, luckily; that is the only consolation I can think of, under the circumstances."

"Why, I shouldn't know the woman if I met her in the street."

"All the worse, man; you can't tell how often you may have been seen in her company."

Whether it is on the principle that tyrants fear their slaves or not, certain it is that the strongest of men will

have, lurking in his secret heart, a traitor fear for the weakest of women; and hence, this doughty Sir William, who feared not Boards, nor bowed before Committees, set about planning an elaborate retreat from his unattractive Circe in black silk, and never once thought of the simple expedient of dismissing her.

"I think I'll run over to Brussels," he said; "the Delaureaux have asked me."

"Come with me, if you will."

"Where to?"

"My native land."

"Why, we have just come from there."

"Not exactly. I am Welsh enough, but I was born in America, near Quebec. My father went there soon after his marriage, carrying with him such a love for the old place, that, when some lucky hits in timber made a rich man of him, he sent me over to buy Clyddfan, having seen it advertised; but he died just as the purchase was completed, and six months after my mother married a sort of under foreman he had. I was so enraged that I paid her off the estate, and shook myself free; but we grow out of these youthful fevers, so, as I don't want to 'die and endow a college or a cat,' I am going over to see if she has left any decent children. I was the only one of my father."

"She is not living?"

"No; 'tisn't a pleasant thought for a man to think that he has been too hard upon his mother, and can never make it up to her. My stepfather is dead too."

"Don't waste too much tenderness on the young Yankees, though."

"Not much fear of that; and, of course, I don't go as a Britisher in search of an heir."

"Well, *bon voyage*—I shall stay here till you must go ; it is early yet for Brussels, and surely our united forces can resist any amount of Tuezek."

"That's right, old friend ; you are wise, I verily believe, in leaving her a clear coast ; but you looked so portentously solemn a while ago, that I was afraid you were going to talk about sparing her feelings, and that is a fatal symptom in a case like yours."


Before long, Mrs. Tuezek was left to her own devices, with the faintest possible chance of becoming Lady Mabington.



CHAPTER XI.

"HER MAJESTY'S MAILS."

Ted to Dr. Murray.

" HAVE been lost in the desert. There is a curious satisfaction in writing this, partly, I suppose, due to one's instinctive trust in the rarity of events repeating themselves; partly because here the very word desert paradoxically suggests the loveliest spot imaginable. It was its beauty that led me into peril. Rain had fallen the day before, and the woods were in such dazzling glory that though we were on new ground, I was continually beguiled away after tempting studies, and had been nearly lost so many times that when the event really happened it was not believed in either by our party or myself. The first thing that aroused me was a shy, green pigeon alighting at my feet. I wondered at its venturing within sound of our guns, and then it suddenly occurred to me that it was not so. I listened, attentively enough now, but could detect nothing above the hum of birds and insects, save the strange calling note of the trogon. Then I knew, rather by feeling than

reason, that I was lost, but it did not trouble me much, there were plenty of edible berries about, and water.

"All that day I was pretty brave, and also the next, but then I grew desperate, almost fierce, with the baffled instinct of self-preservation ; if any one had come to me then, I think I should have flown at him, like a wild beast, in the rage of my pain.

"Of course I had tried to regain the track of our party, and failed ; I still kept shouting, too, at intervals ; but, on the evening of the third day, I found myself voiceless, and palsied with fear and weakness. Then, 'in my extremity, I called upon God, and He heard me.'

"First came over me that strange, exquisite calm which some people—I for one—feel in the intervals of sea-sickness ; then a sense of exultation that I could suffer so and yet live ; a wild, contradictory triumph, like that which Milton gives to Satan in hell, only without the rebellion. I can understand now how a martyr, however mistaken, may sing at the stake. There is some chord in man's nature which gives out music just before it snaps. I suppose it is that the climax of all things is spherical, and it is the opposites which meet ; frost-bites burn, and burnt persons shiver.

"By-and-bye I crawled under the shade of a flowering tree, something like our hawthorn, and the resemblance, aided by the like scent of the blossoms, sent me into a dream of home that was almost a vision, especially when a little brown gazelle trotted up and looked at me with gentle eyes, like those of the little one when she used to bring me some of her deep questions. I awoke at length from one of our interminable talks to find a dark brown native bending over me.

"Still in the soft deep calm of exhaustion, I scarcely looked up, only wondered tranquilly what he meant to do with me, and resisted merely from laziness when he tried to set me walking beside him. The resistance was too passive to prevent his half leading, half carrying me along for about a mile to his chieftainess, who seemed to be holding a sort of court. She received us with good-tempered stolidity, gave me food, and some medicine, which, I suppose, was a narcotic, for I fell down shortly after in a dead sleep, and did not wake till daybreak. Then I found that a visitor had arrived, another female chief, who had fallen in with our party looking for me, and the two ladies were quarrelling as to who should furnish me with a guide to my friends, both being anxious for the probable reward. They were neither of them favourable specimens of feminine sovereignty. It takes a very high state of civilisation to make a strong-minded woman charming; with that she becomes, like the Greek Hypatia, a semi-goddess. But these two were more like semi—the other thing. They settled the question at last, and I found myself given over to some twelve hours' companionship with a guide, who was a curious instance of the meeting of extremes: no Belgravian Jeames could have served me more perfectly or with more complete indifference.

"It was like rising from the dead to find myself among the familiar faces again; but, if savages are as ready to generalise from particulars as we are, it will be currently reported among the tribes of Nyamoana that Europeans salute by knocking the friend down, for the head of our party giving me a friendly tap on the shoulder, I fell flat on my face, and being too weak to rise, maintained for some moments that oldest of orthodox postures of

obedience. Do not be uneasy about me though; Sir Charles Durnston has physicked and rallied me into rampant health again. His man, Tuezek, is a capital nurse, but he has fallen among the missionaries lately, and become what he calls a changed character, much to the disgust of his master, who, being a few years older, does not relish Tuezek's persistent post-mortem allusions. The poor fellow has commissioned me, of all people, to discover his wife when I return to England, and to give her his savings—some five hundred pounds. It seems he deserted her.

"One week after. (Of course, this letter is written by bits.) Poor Tuezek, whose end I spoke of so flippantly, has met it. The day after I was writing he had a sun-stroke and died.

"Sir Charles is a good deal depressed; he said last night, 'I have no deserted wife on my conscience, but I have loved two women: the one, Lady Louisa Mabington's sister, died in her youth, and mine; the other, I only met after she was married to a scamp of a dancing-master. For her own sake, I went away from her, but if I was dying, I should like to know that some one would be kind to their only child, little Luigia Rameau.'

"As you may suppose, this speech moved me somewhat, but I said nothing; chiefly, I think, because I have noticed a curious air of mortification come over people on learning that the objects of their reminiscences are flesh-and-blood acquaintances of yours.

"By the way, if you should hear of any grass-widow, will you let me know? The last thing Tuezek heard of his wife was, that she was tolerably prosperous as a house-keeper. The name is, curiously enough, the same as that of my aunt's first husband, but he had no brothers,

nor relations at all, that I ever heard of; and I don't want, now that I have shaken myself free of her, to return in any way to that incubus of my youth."

"No, indeed!" was the doctor's emphatic exclamation, as he closed the letter.

"Did she bring him up?" asked Huldah.

"Only nominally; but, as Ted said once, she was one of those people who salt a favour well, to make it keep."

"What were his parents?"

"My first patients, for one thing. His father was a warehouseman in the city; very successful as a salesman, but his department, as they call it, was underground, with only a reflected light, and no ventilation. Ten years' hard work in this place used him up, and he found himself, at thirty-five, out of employment, constitution gone, and just two hundred pounds to keep his wife and little Ted upon."

"What did they do?"

"Took a small shop, the very one over which you and Luigia lived when we first met; opened that, and set to work experimenting on how much care it takes to kill a man. I had many such patients afterwards, till I got quite morbid over them, and used to think those bright rows of shops were the saddest sight in London; when in one, I had a fever case, raving about a payment to be made next day, and, in the midst of his delirium, breaking off to say, collectedly, 'Of course, you know, doctor, I am only light-headed—you won't mind what I say.' Then the poor fellow fell back, moaning 'Suspicion is bankruptcy, and bankruptcy is death—death.' Ted's father was not so bad as this, but the mother died, virtually of standing in the shop when she should have been

in bed, and he soon followed. I have wondered, sometimes, that no one seems to be awake to the pathos of such lives; we pity poverty in fustian, with its beer-cans and strikes, and poverty in seedy black, with its social status and possible bishoprics, but the class between, lacking the alleviations both of coarseness and culture, we seem somehow to overlook."

"What became of Ted?"

"Mrs. Smith, who succeeded them in the shop, took him as an errand-boy. One blustering night, when he was putting up the shutters, a gust of wind caught one, and blew him along the street; he would not let go, but a sudden violent puff knocked him down, and the heavy shutter falling on him, broke his arm. I happened to be passing, and picked him up; he took it all coolly, only saying, 'Not home! aunt will row me so for going back in bits—the hospital's close by.' It was, and there his arm was soon set; it was only a simple fracture; but the nurses made sad complaints of him, as an 'owdacious young dog;' and he upset two cases of dislocation by making them laugh so. So I took him home to his aunt, and she somehow worried and stifled him into a low kind of typhoid fever that was going about just then. He would have died with her, so I just packed him up, and brought him home with me, only thinking—poor Ted!—what a young nuisance he was."

"He never left you again, did he?"

"No, we grew together, somehow, like a graft on a tree; the graft, as usual, being the most worthy. I doubt if anything could really sever us now."

"Yes," said Huldah; "He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child, shall have him become his son at length."

"I used to think that read like a threat, but Bible threats seem often to turn to promises."

Just then Luigia came in, saying, "What will you give for a letter from Brussels?"

"What will you give for one from Ted?" was the reply.

The missives were exchanged, and Ted's carried off. The Brussels letter was from Sir William Mabington, and after some friendly inquiries ran thus :—

"Who should turn up as an acquaintance of the Delaureaux but your little Luigia's father? I am sure it is the same Rameau ; he is such a mean scamp. Got introduced to them two or three years ago, as being of royal blood ; which they found to be really true: his grandfather, by the mother's side, was a Bourbon, but a *mauvais sujet*, and he excels him. Delaureau's niece, poor little thing! dazzled by the title of princess, which he promised her, was to have been married to him about the time that young Vindon was in Brussels, but he unaccountably disappeared, and has never been heard of since. They suppose he had been gambling, and lost. Of course, it was a good riddance, but poor Mademoiselle Thérèse cannot yet bear the mention of his name.

"It seems a pity that some good fellow does not try to console her ; she is certainly attractive, fair and slender, and innocent-looking. They are all coming back with me for the summer, as Delaureau has business in London.

"I enclose an American letter from Morgan Griffiths. Mrs. Murray may feel interested in the future owner of her native Clyddfan ; at present, that individual is simply a 'not impossible he,' with no definite personality."

"What a rascal that Rameau is!" said the doctor.
"Had you ever heard of his Bourbon connections?"

"Gwen mentioned them once; but he was not so hardened then, he rather shrank from disgracing them by his claims."

"Signor Gondio showed some discrimination, then, in choosing Luigia, among all his pupils, for the Queen part in his opera."

"She has some claim to royal blood on her mother's side too," said Huldah; "we are of the family of Prince Llewelyn, I believe."

"What, Shakespeare's Prince Llewelyn?"

"Yes."

"You never mentioned it."

"We have no papers, and mere tradition does not go for much now, but the people round Clyddfan have always considered us as descended from his youngest son."

"Well, both you and the little one have some of the traditional marks of royal descent; they are the only points in which you resemble each other."

"What are they?"

"Straight, delicate eyebrows; long nose, and short, curved upper lip."

"That sounds like a superstition growing out of the 'Divine-right-of-kings' notion."

"Implying that they are a different order of beings? Well, it does rather; but, remember, long ago I named you Queen Huldah."

"Yes, you are safe as Prince Consort, if ever we have 'Justice to Wales.'"

"You don't mean that you wish it?"

"Not I; only a sentimental grievance seems to give a

nation more dignity than it does an individual ; and poor Wales has been rather cruelly ignored until lately."

"Look at her Welsh blood flushing her cheek ! Griselda was not an ancient Britoness, that is clear."

"What does Mr. Griffiths say ?"

"Change the subject, eh ? Well, I am willing ; only rest tranquil—I should never have loved 'a meek and patient spouse.'"

The letter began :—

"Luckily, I am a perfect old tom-cat, in a power of waiting and watching. That process must, apparently, be continued in future for the heir of Clyddfan. Clearly, my half-brother will not do : he is a tolerable specimen of a class which is not so confined to the blacks as the whites choose to imagine ; a man who will work only to supply his bodily needs, and without these to stimulate him to exertion, would be a mere loafer.

"Before we had been ten minutes together, he coolly informed me that his brothers and only sister were dead, and that if I meant to leave him anything he would rather have it at once. I took him at his word, and contrived to make him understand that he would get no more. It was useless to try and gain any particulars concerning my mother from him. He is one of those talkers who remember only their own share of a conversation, so that his reminiscences consist of very short remarks of hers, interspersed with very long replies of his. He has one child, a self-possessed young woman of some twelve years old, who managed to humbug me with her great calm eyes, till she took to asking me, with an air of philosophical inquiry, whether I did not think she

would be better-looking if she were better dressed? adding, 'Of course, I gain nothing by what you give father.'

"I shall be glad to leave before their abominable winter sets in. I had almost forgotten the place, and do not like it. If the Yankees judge Great Britain from Canada, and Canada from Quebec, it is no wonder they have such a patronising opinion of our senility; but, after all, it is not English, though, like the rest of the Canadians, they seem to be looking forward to the Prince of Wales's visit with a lively mixture of feelings—pride at having a real live Prince to show the Yankees, and vexation at being supposed to care about him."

"Well," said Luigia, when the letters had all been read, "Africa, Brussels, Canada; everybody seems to be moving about except us."

"Do you feel inclined to move?" asked Huldah.

"No, I have not half the spirit of enterprise in me that I had long ago; prosperity does enervate one rather; makes one like a dormouse curled up in its hole, not inclined to turn out without a pretty sharp poke."

"But why should one turn out?" said the doctor.

"I don't know; only everybody has to do it some time or other."

"Don't turn fatalist, pussy-cat;" and the doctor hurried away, as though he saw Fate coming, and would fain outrun it.



CHAPTER XII.

CHANGES.

IT was a rainy summer evening, the soft patter of the falling drops subdued the street noises, and gave a curious, dreamy sense of stillness. Very peaceful was it in the doctor's dining-room, where Huldah sat waiting for him; working, fitfully, at a pair of slippers, and musing the while. "How strangely one's life turns round! I never thought to take to fancy-work in my old age, and for a lover too, for he is my lover still, though he has been my husband so long—faithful Alick!" For a while her mind rested upon the thought, like a bee poisoning itself on a honey-flower; then she continued, "I wonder how we came to love each other so, we two grave, reserved people, meeting when our youth was past—how could you love me so, my Alick, mine?" Her lips closed over the word, with the concentrated tenderness peculiarly hers, and a soft love-light shone out on her face. In spite of her forty years, Huldah's was a beautiful face still; the bright, fair hair and dark brown eyes throwing up the clear delicate cheek and brow, and

softening the proud, firm lines of the mouth and chin ; a face to study and to love. Perhaps the doctor thought so, as, entering just then, he stooped and kissed it ; a long, close kiss, pressed down upon her lips, as though to strengthen his own for what they had to say.

"What is it?" she said, looking up instantly, in alarmed inquiry.

"Perhaps nothing ; did I frighten you? I am sorry, only it is such a relief to give out my fears."

"Of what?"

"This Chemical Company of ours—I am afraid it is getting all wrong."

"Is that all?"

He smiled at her.

"Is it not enough? If it smashes, we shall be ruined."

"I suppose so, but my fears had taken a personal turn. I was afraid you were ill, or,—I did not know what."

"Sir William is at home, that is one good thing ; he is as good as counsel's opinion on all questions of finance."

"What did he think of it?"

"Never liked the scheme from the beginning, but I thought that was only because he has always kept his affairs in his own hands."

"The dividends were paid all right last time, were they not?"

"Yes, but that does not prove much. I suppose they would keep them up to the last, to allay suspicion."

"Can you not sell your shares?"

"I might not find it easy ; besides, I don't like the idea of putting some other poor fellow's neck under the guillotine, even to save my own, though there is not one of my fellow-directors but would groan at my squeamishness. That is the worst of this sort of thing,—one gets into a

nest of people that one cannot approve; it is responsibility without power."

"Might you not lessen that by withdrawing from the board of directors?"

"Yes; but anything like a division would let in the air upon our house of cards, and down it would come. If possible, I would rather keep it up; it is not only our loss and the odium of a bankrupt company, but there are so many poor practitioners who have scraped together a few hundreds, and invested them with us as a provision for their children. After all, Mudberry may pull us through; he is secretary now, and he is certainly a clever fellow."

"Well, I know you will do what is right, and I shall be content anyhow."

"Yes, that is one comfort; you don't belong to the only type of woman I used to believe in—those whom a shabby bonnet will send into hysterics."

"We must begin retrenching gradually."

"Yes."

But when one so unsuspicious as the doctor is aroused, the mischief is generally done. He did not find it out till next day, but that evening the offices of "The Society for the Supply of Pure Drugs" closed, to open no more.

"Where is Luigia?" said the doctor, presently, glad to dismiss the subject for a while.

"She is gone with Sir William to that Orphan School dinner; he proposed, and carried, that ladies should dine with the gentlemen instead of looking on, and then remembered that he had no lady to take, so begged for Luigia; as it was his own innovation, he did not like to go without one."

"Why could he not take the Delaureaux?"

"They were all going to a conversazione, or something,

at the Institution in Albemarle Street. Monsieur has just joined it. But they went this morning, with Luigia and Sir William, to look at some houses he has been buying on the Hendon Road."

"Houses! how many? I thought he did not care for them."

"Twenty, a row that some builder had ruined himself over; they are freehold, and he wants the vote for the county."

"Here she comes," said Huldah, as the Mabington carriage drove up; "alone though."

Luigia entered, wearily, saying, "Oh, auntie! we were so tired, I would not let Sir William come home with me; his speech was the best, because it was the shortest."

"How did you enjoy yourself?" said the doctor.

"Very much; only it is a kind of mild dissipation that one would soon get enough of. We had some queer things for dinner; I half expected to be invited to partake of roast mouse. The carte was in that curious French that fashion-books affect, so that waiters translated it confidentially. One poor lady got awfully scowled at by her husband for saying, 'Oh yes, some guinea-pig, if you please,' when she was offered roast guinea-fowl. The orphans, poor little souls! were marched round, when we had finished; rather a tantalising arrangement, I should think."

"Was there any music?" said Huldah.

"Yes, some, very good, but I did not much like the position of the singers; they dined with us, but they were all huddled together at a table by themselves. It reminded one of the servants in *Pickwick*, where the juniors took dinner in the 'wash'us.' I daresay, though, it only looked uncomfortable from our side of the room;

but, after all, this morning was the best ; we had the open carriage, and it was such a lovely ride, the rain had not begun."

"What sort of houses are they ?" said the doctor.

"Six are dear little nests, something between a cottage and a villa ; the others are all of a row, ugly, miserable, upright and downstraight places."

"I wonder what sort of people live in them," said Huldah.

"The agent showed us one of the tenants, a little old man, carrying a blue cotton handkerchief filled with bits of meat ; he had been two or three miles to a cheap butcher's, yet his income is about four thousand a year. He is a large freeholder somewhere on the other side of London, but he will not live near his property for fear of being imposed upon as a rich man. His house, they say, is absolutely bare except for kitchen stoves ; he has a fancy for these, and has a different patent in every room."

"Is he crazy ?"

"Not a bit, too keen rather. Next door to him lives a poor artist, a widow, who exhibited a picture last year, and fainted on the Academy steps from sheer want. I should hate to be poor," concluded Luigia, shuddering ; then, hurriedly turning away from the subject, as though it repelled her, she said, "Sir William has sent us tickets for to-morrow ; Monsieur Delaureau is to deliver a lecture at the Institution. We are to meet there."

"I do not feel inclined to go," said Huldah.

"Oh, you must, auntie ; it will be really good."

"I think we may as well," said the doctor. "I could talk to Sir William, after the lecture."

"What is the subject ?"

"The substrata of Belgium, and the history of the river Scheldt ; partly geological and partly popular ; very interesting, I fancy."

"Very well, we will go."

So they went.

"One would almost like to live here," said the doctor, when, the lecture over, they came out of the quiet, pleasant little theatre.

"Yes," said Huldah, "there is something fascinating about the learned repose of a savant's life."

"I don't know about the repose," said Sir William ; "they have their bickerings over different theories ; and was there not a French student who shot himself because he could not understand the occidental parallax when everybody else could ?"

"Everybody meaning, as usual, some bodies," suggested Luigia.

"Would you mind driving round Piccadilly way ?" said the doctor to Sir William ; "I want you to go to our Company's office with me."

"That *bête noire* of a company !" said Luigia ; "let auntie and I go home first."

So it was arranged, and they were at home, waiting dinner, when the doctor returned.

He came in with a white, set face, and said, quietly, "The office was closed ; it is all over with us."

Like the survivors on a wrecked ship, the three sat and looked at one another, dumbly and helplessly, for a while ; but in the stillness they gathered strength,—strength that was needed.

A time of terrible harassment followed ; such harassment that the doctor would assuredly have gone mad but for the necessity of attending to his patients through

it all ; the blessing of alleviating another's pain helped him to bear his own.

What he feared was that he should be a bankrupt ; and for a while this seemed inevitable. But, after much talking and calling of names, it was found that the creditors would be satisfied with all that he had, about five thousand pounds, and a certain sum yearly, for two years.

It was rather a curious arrangement ; one more easy might have been made had he been less scrupulously honest ; but, on the other hand, had they trusted him less, perhaps none would have been possible short of bankruptcy and the consequent disgrace, which, though they seemed to sit lightly enough on his fellow-directors, would have been as death to the doctor.

It was not only a question of moral character, but his medical position was a somewhat distinguished one, and it is, unfortunately, not a worn-out truth that "malice loves a shining mark."

Now, however, nothing could be said against him ; his practice seemed to be uninjured, and would amply suffice for the required payments, so that, as Luigia said, they had no "remaining difficulty to solve, save the trifling problem of how to live on nothing a year."

Sir William Mabington had helped materially, both by his advice and position, and urged the doctor to accept more substantial aid, but he would not ; he said that pecuniary obligations always spoilt a friendship, and theirs was too precious to be risked, so he would rather fight on by himself. He agreed, however, to become a tenant of one of the new houses at Hendon, at a very low rent, as he meant to retain only the ground floor of his present one, saying, "The upper part will let for a

hundred a year ; I can spare another hundred from my practice ; so we must live upon that—two hundred a year."

"Why, lots of people do," said Luigia ; "it will be good fun."

"Only, that of late we have been used to just four times that," said Huldah.

"Oh, never mind ; don't let's keep a servant. I have sometimes wondered what those three great women found to do ? Let me be housemaid, with some dear, dirty old soul as charwoman."

Some such arrangement was made, and they moved into one of the tiny villas which Luigia had admired on the day of the company's downfall.

"It is strange," she said, a week or two after their removal ; "we are not half as miserable as we ought to be. Monsieur and Madame Delaureau looked ready to cry when they called the other day, and Mademoiselle van Heil was rather impertinently condoling ; but really, except that the chairs are always amongst our skirts, and the ceilings seem to rest upon one's head,—really, I don't see that we have lost much."

"No," said Huldah, "except for an uncomfortable, nervous feeling that the doctor must want us to take care of him all day."

"I suppose we never thought before that he could make a mistake. I think, too, it is partly the instinctive, protective feeling which any sense of trouble gives us for those we love. I feel it for you, sometimes, auntie—a kind of topsy-turvy mother-yearning."



CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEEPENING OF THE SHADOWS.



AN incident which occurred about this time brought out Luigia's "protective instincts."

One evening at dusk, there came a ring at the bell; the old charwoman had gone home, and Huldah, expecting the doctor, went to the door. No sooner was it opened than she was pushed backwards, and a man thrust himself in.

Huldah screamed, for the first time perhaps in her life. Luigia sprang forward, and, scarcely conscious what she did, wreathed her slight fingers in the man's coat collar.

"Are you hurt, auntie?" she said eagerly, holding tighter, as the man struggled.

"No," said Huldah.

"Then will you get a policeman?"

"Yer can't," said the man; "I timed him, he won't be back for twenty minutes."

"Very well, I must keep you till he comes," said Luigia.

"B'ain't yer 'fraid?"

"Not a bit; we will have this thing off though," and

she plucked down the piece of old cloth that had served for a mask. Then a sudden change came over her; the face thus disclosed was so pitiful, such a starved, hopeless, wan face, that a gush of ruth flooded her heart, and drowned her courage in tears: "How could you?—Oh, how could you be so miserable?" she said.

The man looked at her with something the same look of puzzled, sullen pleasure as that with which he would have confronted an angel.

"Starved," he said; "had nothin' day and a half."

"Oh, auntie, let him have some bread and meat."

Huldah went to the pantry, and Luigia releasing her prisoner, he sank dubiously on to one of the hall chairs.

"How did yer git such a grip?" he said, with what would have been a smile had not his dry lips been too stiff.

"Playing the piano, I suppose," Luigia answered, abstractedly.

"Pianner—ah, I couldn't git one o' them; they're awful dear, I 'spect. It 'ud be worth while a'most for two or three of us, though, to club together; we loses many a job through bein' such butter-fingers."

Whether he was in jest or not did not appear; there was a terrible earnestness in his attack on the food. After a few mouthfuls, a ghastlier pallor overspread his face, and, with blue, quivering lips, he said "Let me out; I'll not go away."

They opened the door, and he laid himself down flat upon the dewy grass.

"Well," said Luigia, whose spirits always rose in an emergency, "of all the predicaments for two lone, lorn women, I never heard of a fainting burglar."

"What upset him, I wonder?" said Huldah.

"Food too solid, I fancy. I will get him some bread

and milk ; he is nearly starved to death, poor fellow ! Did you feel his arm ? but for the bone, it would be no thicker than my wrist."

Presently the man staggered back, and dropping again into the chair, said, " May I stop here a bit ? " with that look of appealing helplessness which, even in a dumb animal, is irresistible.

They fed him for a few moments, and by degrees the flesh colour returned to his face.

" How about the policeman ? " said Luigia, whimsically.

" He is of age, ask himself," said Huldah ; an inconsequent reply, but she was just realising that the matter like most problems involving that unknown quantity humanity, grew more insoluble the deeper she went into it.

" Yer may give me in charge, if you like," said the puzzling " subject ; " " I don't feel to care just now. On'y I tell yer if the bobby come in sight, I should run ; it's nature I 'spect, 'most anything 'll run when yer go to catch it."

" Are there not some reformatories for men ? " said Luigia.

" No, don't do that with me ! I've heard of 'em ; don't, for God's sake, reform me." His indifference had suddenly changed to an intense eagerness of fear.

" It reminds one of the Gadarenes beseeching Christ to depart out of their coasts," said Huldah.

Luigia tried to inspirit him, saying, " They would make quite another man of you."

" That's the very thing ; it hurts a man to turn him into somebody else. Why, look here, I've knowed mysel' nigh upon thretty year, ever sin' I were quite a little

chap; come what may, I mostly knows what I'll do next; but let them reformin' pipples catch hold of me, and make me a haltered crackter, why it 'ud be worse nor dyin', for I should know it after."

He had spoken with many pauses for breath, in his mingled earnestness and weakness, and now was silent, exhausted.

"Strange," said Huldah, reflectively, "how one is always coming upon metaphysics in unexpected places!" She added, more practically, "If I give you five shillings, will you try to start in an honest living?"

"I'll try; but it's hard enough for them as has allus bin in that line; I never took to it myself."

"But," said Luigia, seriously, "if you keep in this, you may kill some one some day."

"No fear o' that. I've had burglary and pickpocketing agin me often, but never with violence; they calls me 'Gentleman Jemmy' for that; and bein' rather a swell in my talk, it allus come easy for me to talk like the gentle-folks."

"Well," said Huldah, "you may as well go now, before the policeman comes back; there is the money. Try, at any rate, to get something honest to do; this is a miserable life, after all."

"'Tis that," and, gulping down the apple in his throat, "Gentleman Jemmy" limped away into the darkness, to reappear no more, until the Judgment-day.

When the doctor heard their adventure, he decided, of course, that a man would have managed better; though, as they had neither been hurt nor robbed, it seemed that, under the circumstances, there was not much room for improvement. But Huldah and Luigia gladly agreed to his dictum, that for the future they must keep

a boy to sleep in the house. Accordingly they secured the services of one Tobias, a youth of the district, whose face looked like a sample of every possible disfigurement; being freckled, scarred with cuts, pitted with the small-pox, nose askew, and one cheek-bone higher than the other. But it is doubtful whether Adonis was a useful member of society, and, if not, Tobias certainly excelled him.

He could garden, groom, drive; manage sheep, chickens, or bees; so said the neighbourhood, unanimously.

The doctor's family needed him for none of these things, but they found him so useful that Luigia threatened to name him "Phillis the neat-handed," in contradistinction to Mrs. Yicks, her realised vision of "a dear, dirty old charwoman," whom they had tried to consider a substitute for a servant.

Mrs. Yicks was a civil, honest old soul, but such an animated soot-bag, in her faculty for dirtying everything she came across, that she was at length persuaded to change places with Tobias, and confine her energies to boots and stoves, and, in general, such things as were the better for being blacked; while Tobias scoured, and cleaned, and cooked, like an old sailor—"anything," he said, "to save young mistress's steps."

He was Luigia's sworn slave. Huldah he regarded as a sort of Juno (supposing that he had ever heard of such a personage), to be revered from a distance, and never to be slighted or lightly spoken off; but it was for Luigia that he worked; for her that he professed himself "awful fond of getting up early, and rubbing things to rights;" for her that he used to glide about the rooms in his stockings, a veritable housemaid; for her he even kept peace with the cat, though this last cost him a struggle, which

puss appreciated, as she showed by always keeping respectfully aloof.

As some reward for the devotion of her little foot-page, Luigia began to teach him to read, as it had somehow happened that he had either never learned or had entirely forgotten.

Tobias got briskly through his letters, which she taught him from blocks, and he soon found that it was as easy to build words with these as houses, but when he was promoted to easy readings of "Jack is a big boy" the young student's scholarly enthusiasm suddenly deserted him; he declared that he "could see no sense in reading after all. Who was Jack? where was he? What did he, Tobias, care whether Jack was big or little?"

Luigia, thinking that the book was too childish for him, gave him Pinnock's English History instead, but he affirmed that this was only "'Jack is a big boy' over again; just a lot of Jacks fighting and making a fuss, ever so long ago."

The boy was entirely without that love for the study of human nature which distinguishes our age in opposition to its harder characteristics.

A book of travels fared no better. "It was all very well to go to the places, but what was the use of talking the journeys all to bits?"

At last, in despair, Luigia brought down a treatise on mechanics, and Tobias was a reader forthwith.

"That's something like, ain't it, miss? Will it tell us how to make them things?" he said, pointing to one of the illustrations.

"I suppose so," said Luigia, rather out of her depth; but her pupil had found his element, and swam off in it, like a young duck taking to water.

Chiefly by the help of the drawings, for he could not understand half the terms, he managed to model a steam plough, that, with a spirit lamp, "really worked," and, being shown to Sir William Mabington, so delighted him that he offered to article the boy to an engineer.

The offer was gratefully accepted, and Tobias, though, as he said, he never did anything to be talked about, became a successful practical mechanist.

"Tobias the handy" was missed in the household, and they could not afford to replace him, even had that been easy.

The *esclandre* of the bankrupt company had injured the doctor's practice, and it was all he could do to keep up the payments agreed upon, swelled, as they were, by collateral claims ; so many of the late shareholders came to him with the appeal *ad misericordiam*, which he found irresistible,—old fellow-students, whom he had long forgotten, but who had remembered "Clever Alick Murray," and been attracted to the scheme by his name.

The worst of it was that these tales were generally true, and their narrators not clamorous, but patient victims ; they made no demand, only preferred a petition—for help in canvassing for some medical appointment, or for a school presentation "for one of the boys, poor fellows!"

The matter generally seemed to resolve itself into a question of money,—the money he could ill spare, and yet could not refuse,—and so the doctor's poverty seemed to be closing round him, like one of the old cells of torture, the strong, stifling walls coming ever nearer and nearer.

Even Ted was disappointing just now ; the letter which contained the news of their troubles had been crossed by one from him, announcing that he had accepted another two years' engagement.

Sir Charles Durnston, perhaps unwilling to lose the invigorating companionship of his young compatriot, had offered him the post of private secretary, with the special task of deciphering and restoring some curious old Portuguese paintings which had come into his possession—an enticing task to Ted, who gladly undertook it.

Drearily the summer faded into autumn, the days only marked by variations in small economies—little, pinching troubles, that thinned Huldah's bright hair and made Luigia a woman at sixteen.

"Auntie," she said, desperately, one day, "do you know I do not believe in saving money? I am sure, if one only knew how, one could earn a pound while one is saving five shillings. Why, absolutely, I dare not take a walk for fear of wearing my boots out."

Huldah looked up wearily; she had been busy with exhausting house-work.

"Well, childie?" she said, inquiringly.

"I was thinking—you know you never will let me help you much, so I might as well be doing something—if I could only earn enough for us to keep a decent servant, it would be a comfort."

"Yes, indeed; but how could you?"

"I think I can sing, don't you?"

"I never heard a voice like yours, except your mother's," said Huldah, waking up into a moment's enthusiasm.

"Suppose I was to be a concert-singer?"

"I dislike that idea."

Huldah's face repeated her words, with emphasis.

"But, auntie,—if the doctor should be ill?"

"I have thought of that lately."

Gravely they stood looking each into the other's face.

"There is no knowing what may become of us," said the two pairs of eyes.

"If I could get some of my old transcribing work, I might do it in the early morning and at night," said Huldah; "and really I do not see why a woman should not take some kinds of reporting for the newspapers; dinners and bazaars would not want shorthand."

"No, auntie, pet, that would not do; there must be a home-bird, and that must be you; but you will agree to my plan, will you not?"

"My poverty consents," said Huldah, with a doubting smile, and they determined to consult the doctor.

It happened that Sir William came home with him, and, as a matter of course, was taken into their counsels.

He approved, and persuaded the doctor to approve, chiefly as it seemed because Cecil had once said that Luigia's voice would make her famous one day.

Cecil living might have been overruled and set aside; Cecil dead was at once a reason and a power for all good deeds. Perhaps that is one of the uses of death—that it sets a saint enshrined in every household. When Sir William was leaving, he called Luigia to him and said, as he put a paper into her hand, "You will want lessons and things, you know; do not be ferociously independent; there's a good child." Before she could remonstrate he was gone. The enclosure was a cheque for a hundred pounds: on the envelope was pencilled "For Cecil's sake;" and, for Cecil's sake, the money was accepted, and set aside for the training of her voice.

"What will you do first?" said the doctor.

"Consult Signor Gondio, I suppose," said Luigia.

"Very well, I will bring him out with me to-morrow night."



CHAPTER XIV.

SIGNOR GONDIO.

SIGNOR GONDIO was an Italian, who, having a native distaste for the Austrian, and a logical dislike to the Pope, very naturally found the land of his birth too hot to hold him, and accordingly came to England, after a youth spent in dilettante treason, according to the powers that were—patriotism, in the estimation of its promoters.

The Signóre was what a young lady would call immensely stout, yet he was not unpoetical-looking: partly, perhaps, because, unlike an Englishman, he never tried to look thinner; yet more probably because he had one of the most beautiful heads that ever compensated for an ungraceful body—oval in shape, it was draped by soft, dark hair, that, without curling, fell always in rounded lines; from under his silky black eyebrows shone eyes so deep and so dark that they seemed less set in his face than shining from beyond it; while his mouth, with the full-red lips parting continually over the white teeth, seemed at once to relieve and protest against the solemnity of those shadowy depths above it.

Like most of the doctor's intimates, Signor Gondio had originally made his acquaintance as a patient—when his first winter in England had resulted in an attack of inflammation of the lungs, that robbed him of his voice, a soft, mellow tenor, which he never recovered for anything beyond teaching purposes ; a misfortune that, perhaps, made him a composer, just as many a man would never have been an author, but for his mind having been forced, at some time of his life, to feed upon itself.

The Signóre's income would have been penury to an Englishman, but his Italian frugality was aided by his double position of exile and artist, placing him outside the pale of social exigencies. He had no one to be scandalised by his picturesque economies save his landlady, and she chiefly protested against his wild salads, affirming, with some confusion as to the law of inquest, that "the crowners would surely sit upon her some day for letting him poison himself with them nasty dandelion and nettle leaves."

Considered as a musician, Signor Gondio's was less a knowledge than an exquisite sense of his art, and, conscious of this, with that devotion with which a man will sacrifice even his own nature to his great work, he resolved to study under a German acquaintance, who precisely reversed his defects.

Dr. Heine seemed to have been cursed with beauty-blindness ; for him there was no such thing as sentiment in music ; a composition was, or was not, "right," and that was all he had to say about it. "Pretty" seemed to be his strongest term of condemnation ; but there was none of the arrogance of pretension in this,—he might be a martinet, but among martinets he was a Wellington.

Signor Gondio could have had no better teacher, as he

felt, even when Dr. Heine's first judgment on his beloved opera was "Put it away,—a mere jumble of pretty airs."

Besides Dr. Heine, the Signóre had but one musical friend. This was a gentleman who combined the avocation of professional and successful librettist, with that of amateur and decidedly unsuccessful trombone-player. For the sake of his beloved trombone, he had suffered every indignity that man is heir to. It had, virtually, turned him out of house and home, for his mother and sisters had declared, at first plaintively, afterwards decisively, that they could not endure the noise.

Thus driven from the halls of his mother, the luckless musician took refuge in suburban lodgings, where he had been in residence about a week when his landlady represented to him that though he was "as nice a spoken gentleman as ever she see, he could scarcely expect her to let him split her head."

Of course, he admitted this, whereupon she made it follow, in apparently logical sequence, that he should "practiz in the airy," adding, in a consolatory tone, "Then, you know, sir, if I shut the front windows, I can fancy it's just the German band a-tunin' of itself."

Gulping down this unappreciative view of his performance, he agreed, and the novel music-hall was soon darkened by the delighted youth of the neighbourhood, who hung upon the railings, in divers positions, inviting one another to reserved seats in such terms as "Hi! here's a mad stage-coachman playin' his horn," and signifying their approbation with "My! ain't he going it?"

He grew used to the boys, but was at last driven off the field by a juvenile nursemaid of an amatory turn of mind, who, with a huge baby to play propriety, used to plant herself at the area railings, and make known her

passion in the frankest manner ; saying, by no means *sottovoce*, "Ain't he a dear? Playing so beautiful, and all ! I do love him—there, and I don't care who knows it."

She did not care, that was evident, and, persecuted on both sides, the unhappy trombone-player was fain to retreat to the back-yard, and accept the post of accompanist to the chorus of cats that was always going on there.

This was the gentleman who had "done" the libretto of Signor Gondio's opera. But only the mechanical work had fallen to his share ; the Signóre had found the story among the Welsh traditions of Brittany, where he had stayed a year before coming to England ; the thoughts and images were mostly Cecil Mabington's, who, having been requested to write some of the songs, had thrown himself into the work with the feverish vividness that characterised the last year of his life.

Like most of us, Signor Gondio had a vision of bliss to which he aspired ; his was not materially unreal, it consisted of two parts—his opera brought out successfully, and Luigia playing Boadiceæ, the heroine. But, meanwhile, the cherished work lay in his desk,—“all wrong,” according to Dr. Heine ; and Luigia's guardians would have shuddered at the idea of her “coming out” as an actress. With Huldah it was a matter of principle, partly hereditary ; with the doctor it was only a question of taste, but taste is even less amenable to argument than principle.

Still the Signóre waited and worked, with that one-idea'd, scarcely conscious perseverance which is the propitious fate of men who will be great.

Even the great wave of patriotism that rose with Gari-

baldi, and reached Italians everywhere, did not alter his course.

Luigia asked him one day, about this time, if he did not feel it impossible to stay in England.

"No," he said, with a quietness that was not without its pathos, "I am thirty-five years old ; ten years ago, I tried to serve my country, and failed ; now, she can do without me. I accept my vocation of teaching little girls to sing."

"Maéstro mio," she answered, softly, laying her hand on his, with an old childish gesture she had only lately dropped,—a mute expression of sympathy.

Even as if it had still been the child's, he raised the little hand to his lips ; then, somewhat abruptly dismissing her, he said, "It is past our time, I have to go out."

As she went home, Luigia was musing tranquilly, "I am almost fond of the Signóre, he has such a beautiful face ; those night-black eyes of his contrasting with his soft, white teeth, that always remind me of his favourite milky chestnuts."

What would she have done,—what could she have done, had she seen him then, kneeling, with clasped, imploring hands, before an ivory crucifix that hung in his room, while his broken words poured forth, "Christ in Heaven, forgive me ; I would wed this child, a heretic : save me, even against my will, Thou gentle hearer of prayer !"

The Signóre had been a follower of Father Gavazzi to the very verge of Protestantism, but there he had shrunk back affrighted, retaining, all his life, the exaggerated dread of an almost convert.

When Luigia and he next met, he was on the eve of starting for Germany, to study harmony in a Conserva-

toire specially famous for that, by the advice of Dr. Heine, in whose charge he left Luigia, exacting a promise, however, that she should not be brought out till his return.

"Mind you don't catch the Goethe fever," said Luigia.

"Ah, you do not appreciate Goethe," said the Signore.

"I suppose women cannot, he did not write for them."

"No."

"Shakespeare did though; for men, women, and children; all ages and all time. By so much is he greater than Goethe."

"Shakespeare greater than Goethe! why, what depth has he? His chief philosopher is a madman."

Dr. Heine, who was present, had listened silently, rather amused at Luigia's heterodoxy, as Newton might have been by his dog Diamond's opinion of the "*Principia*;" but he said now, "There is one advantage in your not having had a musical education."

"What is that?" they asked, surprised at such an admission from him.

"You have more general intelligence to work upon. A young gentleman came to me the other day, who has been at the Academy since he was twelve years old. I forget how, but somehow I happened to mention Columbus. 'Columbus?' said my bright pupil; 'he was a baritone, wasn't he?' 'First fiddle in America,' said I. 'Oh, ah, in America,' he answered. 'I thought he couldn't be much, as I hadn't heard of him.'"

When they had done laughing, the mild little cachinnation that we have substituted for our grandfather's roars, Luigia said, "I do not see how one studying music eight or nine hours a day can get any education."

"Of course, I have just said so," answered Dr. Heine,

who never let one make a foolish speech without knowing it.

Signor Gondio suggested that while he was away, Luigia might go to Milan for a few months, and they began to discuss the plan ; but it was shattered by one of Dr. Heine's granite boulders of sentences. "What is the use," he said, "of studying in one climate to sing in another? You mean to come out in England, do you not?"

"Yes," said Luigia, meekly.

"Well, you would not go to the Tropics to practise for Norway. What should you go to Italy for?"

No one ventured to suggest, "for the sake of the masters," Dr. Heine being in England ; but Luigia said, "How do Italian singers manage when they come here?"

"Make a mess of it, a good many of them, the tenors and soprane especially ; but their fame comes first, and the dear, good English public always dutifully believes as it is bidden."

So the question was settled, rather to Luigia's satisfaction ; her childish memories made her shrink from the thought of Italy.

"We will try your voice now," said Dr. Heine to Luigia.

He put her through some exercises ; then, without comment, took up Mozart's "Flauto Magico," and bade her sing the song of the Queen of Night, with the F in altissimo.

When she had finished, he said, with the calmness of a seer, "Yes, Mozart's music will suit you : it is an exceptional voice, will last about ten years ; by which time you will have made your fortune. You must study bravuras."

"But I hate bravuras," said Luigia. "I should like oratorios."

The Mus. Doctor gave a hippopotamus snort of disdain.

"Oratorios! my dear woman, you might as well attempt to carve with a fruit-knife; but I can account for your fancy. There is an incongruous pathos about your upper notes at present: we must train that, so as to make it effective; if we could get songs written for you, it would be well."

"But I don't feel as if my voice would be worth that."

"Songs are written specially for singers as much because of their defects as their merits, but yours are more peculiarities of compass and quality than absolute faults. Signor Gondio might do this; it would be good for both to come out together."

"Do what?" said the Signóre.

"Write some songs for this pupil of yours; it will be a good exercise, while you are away. Let them range from about the middle C to F in altissimo, something light and pathetic."

"How about words?"

"Oh, the music will suggest them if it is worth anything: let them be rather spiritual:—a seraph turned out of heaven, a water-nixie wailing for its soul, or a flower dying,—anything will do."

The doctor's views of the spiritual were so catholic that his hearers smiled, but he had not the slightest objection to being laughed at, so long as he was listened to and obeyed.

He was terribly wroth when Huldah stipulated that her niece should never enter a theatre.

"Why?" he said, stammering in the excess of his displeasure.

"Her grandfather—" began Huldah.

"What on earth has her grandfather to do with it?"

"It would stir him in his grave to know that his only grandchild was an actress."

"Why! my dear woman" (this was a pet phrase of Dr. Heine's), "you are not surely such a materialist as to suppose that he is in his grave still; and, of course, if he has been in heaven all this while, he is a sensible soul by now, and has outgrown all his mortal prejudices."

"But these are principles," said Huldah. And principles, or prejudices, she held firm; and it was finally arranged that, the exigencies of her voice demanding it, Luigia should be trained in operatic music, but should sing only at concerts.

"The weakest compromise I ever was guilty of," muttered Dr. Heine, when he was alone; "but I could not lose the chance of bringing out such a star as this little girl will be. Signor Gondio shall have his share in writing songs for her, that will suit him better than the practical part of the business. I really don't wonder that his comment on her singing should always be 'Delicious!'—he is melody mad, poor fellow!"

Meanwhile the Signóre was saying to Huldah, "Is it not strange? Though Dr. Heine evidently appreciates our Luigia's voice, yet he only regards its sweetness as a technical peculiarity."

"But you have always said that he might have been born deaf where beauty is concerned," said Huldah.

"Yes, he reminds me of the angel who was set to guard Paradise—always at the gate, and never entering in. I remember seeing a picture of it when I was a child, and being chidden by our father-confessor for

asking him to pray for the angel, I felt so sorry for him, —as I cannot help feeling for Dr. Heine, poor fellow !”

It would startle most of us to know how our friends pity us for that on which we congratulate ourselves.

Dr. Heine had a class at the Academy, and he took Luigia there one day to hear the orchestral practice. She looked with interest on her future companions, and possible rivals ; they seemed to be a pleasant, bird-like little company ; easily moved to tears or mirth by small personal grievances, or very mild jokes, but looking blank at anything like wit or reasoning. She stayed for a chat with some, and found them universally kind-hearted, or at least kind-mannered, with a system of dividing the masters into “angels” and “wretches” that had, at least, the merit of terseness and completeness ; also of comparative fairness, since the “wretch” of one division would be the “angel” of another. Of course the professors, as professors, were, or appeared to be, supremely indifferent to the estimation in which they were held.

“What do you think of your compeers ?” said Dr. Heine to Luigia, as they left the little concert-room, which was chiefly distinguished by a venerable dinginess.

“I like one thing,” said Luigia, “they all have that piquant dash of independence which a definite vocation seems to give to a woman.”

“Definite avocation, I suppose you mean,” said the doctor, who was wont to affirm that it spoilt bread and cheese to call it ambrosia. “Yes,” he continued, “it is pretty in pretty girls,—that is to say, about one in a hundred.”

Luigia’s progress satisfied even her teacher, and he promised that she should sing at his next year’s concert.



CHAPTER XV.

LITTLE LULU.

LUIGIA'S year of study was not absolutely uneventful, though the incident which marked it could not be said to belong to her art-life.

Dr. Murray, like most clever people who profess to know nothing of music, had a curious instinct for classical compositions, and would listen to Spohr by the hour; especially one fugued passage, which he called "The rumble-tumble affair," and always asked for when he was worried, because, he said, "it put him to rights; that bright little bit at the end was just like the singing of birds after a storm."

One evening, when he asked for this, Luigia could not remember the opening bars, and said she would go and get the music.

"Where is it?" said the doctor.

"At Mrs. Rammles'."

"Who is she?"

"I am not at all sure whether that is her name, it is only Mrs. Yicks's version of it; she lives in the end house of the terrace next us, and is that poor artist whose story the agent told me the day Sir William brought me here."

"How came she to have your music?"

"We speak in the garden sometimes, and we happened to get upon music and Spohr one day; she said she had nothing of his, so I lent her my book."

"Well, don't strike up a friendship with her," said the doctor, contentedly; "I don't like women with husbands abroad."

"Why, you know more of her than I do," said Luigia; "I thought she was a widow."

"That is what I object to, they are neither one thing nor the other; this one's husband is a courier or something. The chemist at the corner told me, but he called her Madame Ramer; according to him, she seems to be rather romantic and lazy."

Luigia went for the music-book, with that uncomfortable sense of treason which we bear with us in addressing those whom we have just heard spoken against. She was progressing slowly along her neighbour's garden, when she was arrested by noticing a man swaying from side to side in the path before her.

"The husband come home, I suppose," she thought; "intoxicated too; how horrid!"

She turned to go back, but just then the man staggered and fell. At the same instant a child came skimming, like a swallow, over the grass, and alighted beside him; the dainty little figure, in its fresh pink dress, looking curiously out of keeping with the mud-stained, crumpled coat of the inebriate. But when the child's rosy lips opened, it was with another incongruity. "Who de deuce are you?" they said to Luigia, in tones as sweet and low as a lady's caress. In spite of herself, Luigia drew near to answer, but she could think of no reply save "Who are you, childie?"

"Little Lulu, pretty Lulu, mamma's little canary bird." Then, without the slightest change of tone or look, she turned to the man, and said, "Get up, you lazy lout, tonfound you ! lying there like a pig."

A string of oaths followed, till it seemed as though some evil satyr had taken possession of the little speaker, whose beauty only added to the unreal air of the scene.

"My child, come away, this is not fit for you," said Luigia, raising her, but Lulu crouched down again, laid her hand on the prostrate figure with a strange mingling of protection and defiance, and, looking up with her great, blue eyes, said, "After all, it is my father."

"I never saw you before," said Luigia.

"I have not been out for a long while ; I had no frock, and my throat was bad."

"But I did not know that your mamma had a little girl."

"Didn't you?" But Lulu was childish in one thing,—her undeveloped organ of wonder : she showed no surprise that any one should be ignorant of her existence, nor yet at what was more startling, Luigia's suppressed exclamation and terrified flight, when the figure at their feet drowsily turned over and disclosed its face. It was that of Rameau—her father.

With the panic of her childhood upon her, Luigia fled, and rested not till she lay in Huldah's arms, sobbing out, "Auntie, save me—it is my father."

"It ? where ?" said Huldah, bewildered.

"Next door, where I went for the music ; her name is not Ramer, but Rameau. They must have been married some time, the child looks about six years old."

"Nine years she says she has been his wife," said the doctor ; "don't you think you may have made a mistake?"

"No, I could not ; there was the old, hard shining in his eyes, though they were half closed ; and, though his mouth hung loose, it had the same sneer."

"Rascal !" said the doctor, between his teeth ; "I must devise some pretext for going in to-morrow to see him."

But there was no need for that. The next day, Madame Rameau, as they now called her, sent for the doctor, saying that her daughter was ill.

When he entered, she received him alone, saying, with a faded smile, "From a physician one must conceal nothing : the child has had a shock. Last night her father came home from the Continent, and, as has frequently happened before, we quarrelled. But this was for the last time,—there comes a climax to everything ; ours, oddly enough, was connected with you. He—my husband—desired me to play spy upon you, ascertain what your means were, and especially what were your plans regarding your niece. He asked what her name was, and contradicted me when I said, 'Murray.' I suppose I was partly jealous. She is very charming ; though where he can have seen her I cannot imagine. At any rate, I refused, and the quarrel, extending, of course, to other things, has been final. We have agreed to part. The child was asleep, but he insisted on going up to her alone, to make his *adieux*, he said, with his mocking French sentiment. He stayed some time, and when I went up, Lulu said, 'Wish me good-bye ; you, too, mamma,' and then fell into a kind of fit, lasting about ten minutes."

"Poor little thing !" said the doctor, who, at another time, would have cut short the narrative which detained him from a patient, but now waited to ask, "Shall you remain here ?"

"No; I have more friends in Paris than in England; we will go there as soon as Louise is well."

"That will be never," said the doctor to himself, as he examined his little patient.

He hinted the danger to the mother, who received it with a fit of hysterics; whereupon the doctor, angered by what disabled the child's proper care-taker, ordered her out of the room, and sent for Huldah, to whom he said hurriedly, "You must be nurse for a day or two."

"What is it?" asked Huldah.

"Neglected colds, partly; but every organ the child has is diseased, more or less. She has no circulation; it will be sudden probably."

Huldah watched till the little one fell asleep; then gave place to the mother, who, though she brought a French novel with her, was full of caressing grief over her "Pretty Lulu."

As the days wore on, the child tired of both her nurses, and would have no one but Luigia, to whom she confided that her father, in his farewell, had inquired about her, whether she sang,—“And I told him that you were going to be a great singer at the Opera; Mrs. Yicks told me,” said Lulu, with a child's pride in having given information.

Luigia shivered; she knew her mother's story too well to be willing that her father should hear of her voice.

Chiefly for fear of him, the doctor had decided that Madame Rameau should not be told of the connection between them; lest, as he thought not improbable, she and her husband should come together again, as she admitted that they had done once before, after a similar parting.

"She will be starved into submission now, as then," said he; "she is one of those women who must have a

husband ; so let her know nothing, and she can tell nothing. It is well that his employer's business obliged him to start off again at once ; that was why he tried to get his wife to act as spy."

"I owe her something for refusing to do that," said Luigia.

"Well, pay her in care of the child ; she needs it."

"My little sister." Luigia spoke in wondering meditation, that had much love in it. There was a fascination about the child, especially now that, in her weakness and the absence of her father, she seemed to have got free of the strange profanity that had marred her loveliness.

Madame Rameau was as gentle as she was graceful when she was in the sick-room ; but she was a good deal out of it, and once, when Lulu had been worse than usual, Luigia said, "I will call mamma."

"Oh no," said Lulu, "mamma must not be disturbed for a day or two."

"A day or two?" said Luigia, astounded.

"Yes, she gets so tired, you know, with that horrid painting ; so when papa has been to give her some money, she rests for a day or two, and I have to keep quiet while she reads Eugène Sue, and eats *pâté-de-guimauve*."

"But what do you do?" said Luigia, her interest getting the better of her dislike to inquisition.

"Oh, I have some *pâté* too ; it is nice—do you know it? like a white kid glove, only with a pleasant taste ; it makes my throat well too."

"Does mamma read to you?"

"Sometimes ; it is not very interesting, only one part. There is a poor old man who is obliged to go on living hundreds and hundreds of years ; that must be dreadful—never to attain death."

"To attain death?" repeated Luigia, the expression, from such a babe, sounded so strange.

"Yes, it must be very terrible. Why, I want to die this minute, now papa is gone."

"Did you love him so?" This little sister seemed to Luigia to present a succession of surprises.

"Love him? dear, no! Only, while he kept coming, I was obliged to go on living, to take care of mamma; she was afraid of him,—I wasn't, not a bit. I used to do so at him," and Lulu shook her waxen fist.

"I think you must not talk any more just now," suggested Luigia.

"Oh, the pain is gone, and the doctor said, you know, that it did not matter." She looked deep into Luigia's eyes, with a quiet shrewdness that was strangely pathetic; then went on: "When papa swore at mamma, she fell a-shaking; but I just swore back again,—like two old cats on a wall, we were. Oh-ho!" Lulu fell back in a paroxysm of laughter.

"But, child—child," said Luigia, "sin cannot be amusing."

"Then it was not sin, for it certainly was amusing."

With a quaint air of patronising affection, Lulu said presently, "Don't you wonder that I am not afraid to die?"

"How is it?"

"Ah, that I shall not tell."

Luigia respected the childish reserve, and did not press the question; but, after a while, Lulu said, "I will tell you, so that you may know how to be not afraid."

"Tell me then," said Luigia, caressingly.

"I have loved Jesus Christ all my life."

Like a maiden confessing a lover, the child tried to

cover her face with her tiny hands, but they showed her flushing to the roots of her hair.

Luigia drew the little bent head to her bosom, and showered on it glad, tearful kisses. It was only after a long, deep silence that she spoke. "Who taught you? Did you learn out of the Bible?"

"Oh no, mamma hasn't one; besides, I can't read, you know. I think He must have taught me Himself."

The child spoke with the simplicity of perfect faith. Perhaps some servant or forgotten acquaintance had sown the good seed; or perhaps, as she asserted, it was one of those wondrous instances of enlightening from within which are met with sometimes among the heathen. Not so wondrous after all, considering what man's teaching too often is.

Presently, Lulu repeated, as though she had been accustomed to sun herself in the words, "I love Him, and He loves me."

"But how could you love Him, and blaspheme Him?" said Luigia, repenting as soon as the speech was uttered; but the bright little face remained unclouded.

Lulu answered, calmly, "I don't know; perhaps I shall know to-morrow."

Then, suddenly, as the doctor had foretold, she threw up her hands, and died.

For an instant the arms retained their position, as though stretched up for some invisible friend to take her, then they dropped.

Little Lulu had "attained death."

"My sister! oh, my little sister!" cried Luigia, with a heart-sob, as she left the waxen image with a kiss upon its lips.

Madame Rameau seemed to have become infected with her husband's callousness, for, though she wept over her "angel child," she startled Luigia by saying, in the midst of her tears, "I never saw it before—you and Lulu are alike." So it was with the shadow of her old fear upon her that Luigia went with Lulu to her last resting-place.

They buried the little one in Hendon churchyard under the great yew-tree, one of whose low-growing branches rested, like a protecting hand, upon the child's grave.

Long after, they remembered that the mother would have nothing on the head-stone but "Little Lulu."



CHAPTER XVI.

LUIGIA'S DEBUT.

EARLY in the season, Luigia gave an introductory matinée, and was very well received; but then, as she said, it was her own concert, and one half the people came in for nothing, so that the least they could do was to applaud her.

Next she sang at Dr. Heine's concert, and was greeted with an enthusiasm that would have been cheering, but for the patent fact that the room was chiefly filled by his connections, and that the uncompromising professor, who had a telescopic vision, would not at all have hesitated to stare down any hapless wight who ventured to manifest a lack of appreciation for his favourite pupil. Luigia was confessedly this, though she used to wonder how, if she was so, the others fared, for her lesson was generally enlivened by warlike skirmishes. Dr. Heine was fond of inveigling her into little spirts of enthusiasm, on which he delighted to put an extinguisher,—as thus :

One day he was accusing her of regarding only the pecuniary result of her profession.

"Certainly," said Luigia, "it is for money that I mean to sing to the public, if they will hear me ; but the singing itself would be my study as much if I was alone on a desert island. I belong to my art, and it to me. It is like having some grand god-lover, so high above me, and yet in truth mine own."

"All very pretty," said Dr. Heine, "but those chromatic intervals are decidedly queer ; suppose you turn your attention to them."

Whereupon, Luigia, exasperated, sang with a fierce correctness that set them both laughing.

Very different were her lessons with Signor Gondio, who had returned from Germany altered in many things, but not in his feeling for her ; that had deepened and strengthened with his genius, until, acting subtly on its unconscious recipient, her nature, and with it her voice, had grown out of delicate fancifulness into breadth and strength.

Mozart's spiritualistic poetry could not satisfy either now, and she had chosen for her début a song from the dark, tragic, deeply human, because deeply spiritual, masterpiece of Meyerbeer, "Robert le Diable," or, as a great critic said it should have been called, "Robert the Man." Isabelle's air, "Robert, toi que j'aime," was to be her *pièce de résistance*. She wished, however, to begin with a composition of the Signóre's, and one morning they looked over his manuscripts to see what it should be.

"What is this ?" said Luigia, pointing to one with no title.

"I wrote it for you long ago. I doubt if it would suit you now," said he ; "do you remember giving me the words ?"

"Cecil Mabington's—oh, I must sing that."

"What are they about?" said Dr. Heine, who was present.

"Cecil found the story among some old papers of his mother's. It was when there was war in England. A Cumberland lad, a soldier, found himself near home one night, just as the regiment was ordered to Ireland. He stole away across the hills to wish his betrothed good-bye. After the parting, she, with her little sister, followed at a distance to get a last glimpse of her lover; and found that his absence had been discovered, and that he had been condemned to be shot as a deserter. They led him into the market-place, and she, standing in the crowd, watched all the preparations to the fatal signal; when that was given, she sprang forward between him and the guns, but though one of these flashed in her face and burnt her sight away, the others did their work—her lover fell back dead. With only her little sister as guide, she re-crossed the hills, and when near home sent the child on before. All night they waited for her; then, when the day broke, they went to seek her, and found her lying dead beneath the trysting-tree, a bunch of scarlet nightshade berries in her hand."

"Well, that is dismal enough, at any rate," said Dr. Heine; "where does the song come in?"

"It is supposed to be spoken by her to the little sister, as they went home together; half in soliloquy, as one does sometimes speak to a child."

"We may as well hear it at any rate."

This being the doctor's politest form of request, Luigia sang the little air.

Tender, melodic beauty was the Signóre's forte, and he seemed to have concentrated himself on these words,

which had impressed him with a power beyond their own. The song began with a scarcely perceptible air, running through the soft monotone :—

“Lead me down beside the river,
Where the poison-berries grow,
Where we shall not feel the tumult
Of the people as they go.

Was it only just this morning
That I stood among them all,
Waiting, watching for the signal
That should bid my laddie fall ?”

Here the strain was broken up into troubled chords, as the poor little maiden cried,—

“Oh, how could they, could they kill him,
He so faithful and so kind ?
I rushed forward, not to see it,—
God, in mercy, made me blind.

Little sister, kiss mine eyelids,
It would ease me so to weep ;
Reach me down the nightshade berries,
They will only make me sleep.

Leave me here a little longer,
Tell my mother all is bright:
Hasten home, for fear she miss you:
Little sister dear, good-night.”

Luigia's eyes had grown moist while she sang, but the Signóre, like most clever men, was cool over his own compositions, at least by the time they came before other people ; so he charmed Dr. Heine by the matter-of-fact inquiry, “How will that do?”

“Very well,” said the doctor, “if you can contrive to

squeeze the story into a line or two at the top, or else people will only be wondering what the young person is bemoaning herself about."

"Signor Gondio's friend, the librettist, might do that for us," said Luigia ; and she was not disappointed.

About this time a skilful conductor of concerts commenced a series, with the laudable purpose of creating a taste for good music among his countrymen. It was at one of these that Luigia was to make her real *début*, and neither of her masters, though they professed perfect confidence, could disguise their uneasiness as the time drew near ; for, like most instruments of finer tone than ordinary, Luigia's voice was curiously variable—easily affected both as to quality and compass.

For once, Huldah devoted her thoughts to planning a dress, and the result repaid her. Luigia's was white tulle, over mauve gray *crêpe*, the two producing that perfection of negative colour which we call French or opal white ; this was lit up by the rich crimson and purple of real cactus blooms, that looped up the skirt and on the breast made a glowing spot of colour against Luigia's fair soft neck. On her brown wavy hair a wreath of fresh *cerissa* leaves glistened crimson and silver, fastened by a spray of lilies of the valley, made of the D'Amorie diamonds, which Sir William Mabington had had re-set for her ; each drooping bell being a diamond, the almost invisible stems silver, and the long, pointed leaf malachite. The same, repeated in different sizes, formed earrings and brooch.

Luigia was pale generally, but now the flush of excitement made her cheeks like those of her Welsh ancestress, "roses upon snow ;" above which, shaded by night-black eyelashes, her eyes glowed amethyst-like—still the rare,

purple gray that Cecil Mabington had aptly likened to the mist upon the mountains.

"What does she look like?" said Huldah, gleefully.

"Like a fairy from the tropics," said the doctor.

"Like the Queen of the Cannibal Islands," said Luigia, laughing a child's laugh; but alone in the carriage with Huldah, her mood changed; with white, dry lips she said, "Auntie, they will hiss me. I shall die."

"Hush, darling: God will help you," said Huldah, and they rode on in silence.

What preceded her song Luigia never knew; her consciousness began when she found herself standing, with a blurred mass of faces and dresses beneath her, and a silence of languid expectancy awaiting her first notes.

When these came they astonished the singer quite as much as her audience; one whit less nervousness would have veiled her voice, but as it was, the very tension of her powers gave it a ringing sweetness and power that compelled an involuntary "Brava" in the first pause.

The "Little sister dear, good-night," had been finished by Signor Gondio with a pathetic simplicity peculiarly his own, and when a tumult of applause followed, Luigia maintained that it belonged to him.

This was after all only a ballad, and the general impression in the room, as people read down their programmes for Miss Rameau's next song, was, "Pity she should spoil the effect of what she can do, by attempting what she cannot."

But for once the sober English audience was to be astonished out of its self-possession. With the first "Robert, toi que j'aime" the little village maiden vanished, and there stood before them Isabelle, *noble et*

belle, in all the grandeur of her mingled faith and despair.

Absolutely still as Luigia remained, unaided by dress or scenery, it was a triumph of spiritual over mechanical acting, and through all the passion of her prayer not a note swerved from its faultless intonation; the very sighing in her voice seemed but to make it more ethereally clear.

The young *débutante* had succeeded; she seemed to be borne off the stage in a wave of applause that rose and swelled again and again, mingled with cries of "Encore!" that sounded curiously ominous to Luigia. The spell was off her now, and, in an exhausted whisper, she said to the conductor, "I cannot, indeed I cannot sing again." He was obliged to lead her back, however, and as she attempted to retire with an obeisance, the mutterings of a storm began to arise; it seemed impertinent for so young an artist to decline a recall.

In desperation Luigia raised her little hands with an imploring gesture that commanded silence; then, unconsciously using her native Italian, as she often did when excited, she said, with a look of mingled fun and beseeching, "Tacete, Signórie, mille grazie."

Luigia's speaking voice had the rare gift of growing sweeter as it was raised, and the soft, divided syllables seemed to fall like dropping flowers on the crowd. They were received with a softened clapping of gloved hands, almost tenderly subdued, and she was allowed to withdraw, amid smiling murmurs of "Encore! Tacete!"

With a pretty air of apology she whispered to her conductor, "People seem to like something outrageous."

He said, laughingly, "Some may do anything, you know, according to the proverb, even to the stealing of

horses or hearts ;" then went back to accompany a violin solo, while Luigia passed on to the little withdrawing-room to speak to the next singer—a contralto ; a lady whose sweet womanliness had gained her as many friends as her profound musical science had enemies. Luigia said, " You must not hate me for that hubbub, because you have gone through the same yourself."

" I never had such an ovation as that though," said the other, with a bright, frank smile.

" Perhaps not yet ; people are only now growing up to you ; your best fame is to come."

" Yes, when my voice is gone ; that is the way with our English public."

" Ah ! when mine is gone I shall be nothing.—I must go ; auntie is waiting, looking half dead."

Signor Gondio put them in the carriage, and was leaving them with a brief " Buona notte," when Huldah said, " Will you not come with us ? is there anything you want to hear particularly ?"

" No," he said, " I have heard enough." And he turned away.

Dr. Heine might be as brusque as he pleased, but no one could bear the shadow of an estrangement with the Signóre, so Luigia, laying a gentle, detaining hand on his arm, said, " Are you displeased with me, *maestro moi* ? Was I too faulty ?"

" Faulty ? Pleased !" he answered, in a tone to satisfy her, even on that night ; but he left them nevertheless.

Luigia laid her head down on Huldah's lap and said, " Oh, auntie ! I wish you could kiss me into a child again."

" Ah, there is no going back in life ; but I think that

is one of the wishes that we only indulge in because we know there is no fear of their fulfilling themselves."

"I suppose it is so ; there will be broken lights when the depths of our natures are upheaved to the surface. Auntie, shall I tell you what I find in mine to-night ?"

"Tell me."

"What I suppose every woman does some time or other: love—for—" While she hesitated a sudden spasm passed over her face, and she hid it, shivering.

"What?" said Huldah, startled.

"A shadow at the carriage window, a dark face—
auntie, it was my father!"

Huldah half rose, but Luigia drew her back, saying, "No, don't look ; perhaps he did not see us."

She grew calmer presently, but the broken link of confidence could not be joined again. Rameau had come between them, like an evil omen.

The newspaper notices of Luigia's début were, most of them, extravagantly kindly, pronouncing Miss Rameau the star of the day ; but as this assertion was caught up and reiterated, Luigia grew melancholy over it. If this was true, if it was indeed so that she had gained the heights of Fame, what a flat, arid table-land those heights appeared ! how incompetent her judges, the public, and unequal their verdict ! Those whom she had always revered as the mighty in her world, seemed to lose their halo of glory now that she, Luigia, was apparently entering into it.

"Well," she said, one morning, "I will wait for the *Hellenic* ; its standard ought to be higher."

The paper in question was not apt to err on the side of praise, and in this instance more than satisfied Luigia's desire for "a little pulling down for a change." After

demolishing Signor Gondio's song, the critic continued: "Of course, in the present state of the public taste, a singer whose best note is her F in altissimo is sure of applause; but, for Miss Rameau's own sake, we must protest against her ridiculous affectation of combining contralto expressiveness with the exceptionally soprano quality of her voice. If she can act, by all means let her get an engagement; but, meanwhile, her powers are certainly not more than equal to singing."

"It feels rather like being stabbed," said Luigia, reading the sentence to Huldah; "but I suppose they will not hit again in precisely the same place. I hope not; there is something in the very word affectation that makes one feel as though the skin of one's cheeks was being burnt off."

"To accuse you of that!" said Huldah, indulging for once in the style exclamatory.

"Yes, I thought I was real, at any rate," said Luigia, ready to dismiss the subject, but Huldah shrank with repugnance from the notion of a woman being discussed thus publicly; and, naturally, the censure of her child seemed more objectionable than the praise; at least, she took this opportunity of saying, with the repressed vehemence peculiar to her,

"Childie, give it up; you shall not be subject to such attacks as these; I would rather work my fingers to the bone."

"Now, you darling auntie, what possible good would that be? I object to bony fingers on principle; they are ugly to look at, and awful to touch; besides, did not these identical people pat me on the back tremendously after Dr. Heine's concert, and have they not to keep up their character for candid vacillation? Who am I, little Luigia Rameau, that for me any one should alter the

policy of their paper—a mighty engine, organ—what don't they call it?"

Huldah was inclined to appeal to the doctor, but she knew that he was worried just now with the final arrangement of the affairs of the Chemical Company, and she was silenced effectually by his saying that evening, "The child's success seems the one bright spot on our horizon just now."

If her husband's only light had been kindled by the burning of her home, Huldah could not have lifted a finger to save it.

Luigia was fêted and flattered a good deal, in that pleasant border-land of art-lovers which lies between the profession and the public; but, among her fellow-artists, she seemed to be chiefly esteemed for the handsome carriage that conveyed her to and from concerts and rehearsals. "Miss Rameau must have a voice, to be able to keep a carriage in her first season," said they.

It happened, however, that the vehicle thus used belonged not to Luigia, but to Sir William Mabington. He had a thorough man's-aversion to carriage-riding, averring that it always made him feel as though he either was, or ought to be, an invalid; but he had retained his wife's pet brougham, chiefly, as it appeared, because he could not make up his mind to do anything else with it, and now pressed its use upon Luigia, who gratefully acquiesced, as otherwise, at their distance from town, her first year's earnings would have been almost swallowed up in cab-hire; so, three or four times a week, the stout, old horse trotted out to Hendon, and sniffed the country air as though he liked it. But the doctor was always restless under any sense of obligation, and accordingly began to suggest a return to their old quarters in town.

"But," said Huldah, "how can we afford it? I thought the winding up of the Company's affairs had left us even poorer than we expected."

"Yes, that is partly why I propose it."

"How? We came here because this house is less rent than you get for the chambers in Gwynne Street."

"They only occupy one floor. I use another; we might live above."

"Oh dismal prospect!" said Luigia, "to go back to the dear old house, and meet strangers on the stairs. Who has those rooms?"

"Mr. Wrandall Foxe; he succeeded Sir William as member for Maccleston."

"I think it was a pity he gave up his seat," said Huldah, glad to waive a discussion in which the doctor and Luigia seemed likely to disagree.

"Well," said the doctor, "I don't know; he said it worried him to death, always keeping him in town when he had business abroad. I fancy he only entered Parliament to please Lady Louisa; she came of a race of hereditary legislators, and would have felt it almost a disgrace to have no connection with "The House," but he never made much of a name there; on his own subjects he was listened to with attention, but these did not come up once in a session, and he never went in for any of the popular questions."

"He is accustomed to be prominent, too, in his own set."

"Yes, that made him restless; now, Mr. Foxe has not been used to be of consequence anywhere, so he is quite contented as one of the sheep that follow the bell."

"How came he to succeed Sir William?"

"Their estates join at Maccleston, and Sir William

fancied he would like the seat, so he told him quietly that he intended to resign, and helped him as far as he could. The Maccleston opposition papers called it 'a nefarious transaction,' but really I don't see why he should not be a little more confidential with a friend and neighbour, than with people in general."

"What a pity they did not get hold of a paragraph stating that Mr. Foxe was to pay for his seat by taking lodgings with some disreputable connections of Sir William's!" said Luigia.

"Yes, we might have been made quite effective; especially as he is a meek, little bachelor, and I propose taking you to live with him."

"Well, the nearer one lives to people in London, the less likely one is to make their acquaintance; but I should dislike living in the old house, without the right to enter all its rooms."

"We need not do anything hastily," said Huldah; "something may happen to decide the matter for us."

It was so.







